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G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, NEW YORK AND LONDON

OUR EUROPEAN  
NEIGHBOURS

EDITED BY  
WILLIAM HARBUTT DAWSON

RUSSIAN LIFE IN TOWN AND  
COUNTRY







A STREET SCENE IN ST. PETERSBURG







# RUSSIAN LIFE IN TOWN AND COUNTRY

BY  
FRANCIS H. E. PALMER

ILLUSTRATED

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON  
**The Knickerbocker Press**

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<sup>1</sup> *From a photograph by the author.*





## SOME RUSSIAN WORDS USED IN THIS BOOK

*Artel*—an association, especially of workmen.

*Balik*—sturgeon.

*Batka*—father.

*Batushka* or *Batooshka*—diminutive of “father,” used in addressing a priest.

*Bareen*—a noble, lord, master.

*Bezpopovtsy*—“without priests.” Dissenters who refuse to recognise the priests of the Orthodox Church.

*Bubentchik*—harness or sledge bell.

*Desiatnik*—peasant official, originally elected by ten households.

*Doub*—a species of Russian oak.

*Douma*—council. *Ghorodskaya Douma*—municipal council.

*Dvorianine*—a noble.

*Feldscher*—the village doctor.

*Icon*—sacred picture in the Orthodox Church.

*Iecra*—caviar.

*Ispravnik*—police commissary.

*Izba*—peasant's cottage or hut.

*Kabak*—tavern.

*Khazyaeen*—master of the house.

*Khazyaeeke*—mistress of the house.

*Kholopy*—household serfs.

*Kniaghenia*—princess (by marriage).

*Kniajna*—princess (by birth).

*Kniaze*—prince.

*Koupyetç*—a tradesman.

*Kouznietz*—a smith.

*Kouznitza*—a smithy.

*Kriépostnoy Pravo*—law of serfdom.

*Kustar*—peasant engaged in cottage or village industries.

*Kvas*—non-alcoholic beer. The national Russian beverage.

*Liashieë*—goat-footed woodland sprites.

*Mir*—(1) the world, the universe ; (2) the peasant commune.

*Obrok*—annual payment made formerly by serfs to their owners  
for liberty to work for themselves alone.

*Odnodvoretz*—a yeoman, or small landed proprietor.

*Ouprava*—an executive body.

*Ouriadnik*—lowest grade of police officer.

*Pastook*—shepherd.

*Pastooshka*—shepherdess.

*Pisar*—a secretary.

*Popovtsy*—dissenters who recognise the " popes " or priests of  
the Orthodox Church.

*Raskolnik*—general name for Russian dissenters.

*Rousalka*—water nymph.

*Storage*—house porter and " man of all work."

*Strada*—the labour of the agriculturist, especially during the  
harvest.

*Stradat*—to suffer pain or anguish.

*Samovar*—Russian tea-urn.

*Siomga*—salmon.

*Sotnik*—Peasant official originally elected by a hundred house-  
holds.

*Stanovoë Pristaff*—police officer under the *Ispravnik*.

*Starovery*—" Old Believers." A branch of the Russian dissen-  
ters.

*Stchie*—fermented cabbage.

*Starost*—old age.

*Starosta*—(1) peasant mayor of a village ; (2) elected foreman  
of an *artel*.

*Starshina*—mayor of a commune.



*Svietelka*—a workshop, or small peasants' co-operative factory.

*Tiaglo*—the unit of agricultural labour, consisting of a man, a woman, and a horse.

*Traktir*—a tavern.

*Verst*—a Russian measure. 1166.6 yards.

*Vodiamy*—water sprites.

*Vodka*—Russian corn or potato brandy.

*Volost*—the commune.

*Vratch*—a physician.

*Zemski Natchalnik*—an influential official controlling peasant affairs in each government.

*Zemstvo* (plural *Zemstva*)—elected provincial council.





RUSSIAN LIFE IN TOWN AND  
COUNTRY





# RUSSIAN LIFE IN TOWN AND COUNTRY

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## CHAPTER I

### RUSSIA BEHIND THE VEIL

VISITORS to Russia frequently remark upon their return to England that, to their surprise, they have not found, either in the general aspect of the large and growing towns they have visited, or in the life of the Russian people with whom they may have come into contact, any of the striking national characteristics they had expected. If an Englishman were to be suddenly set down in one of the newer quarters of St. Petersburg, or of any other large Russian town, he might not find it easy to say, at the first glance around him, that he was not in some German, Austrian, or even French city. On closer inspection he would, of course, find many indications that he must be in Russia, but

they would not force themselves upon his attention to the extent he would have anticipated. Still less would he be struck by any essentially national characteristic in the people with whom he would probably come most into contact. The higher classes, he would find, closely resembled the cosmopolitan polyglot Russians whom he had often met with in Paris, Nice, or London. The tradesmen with whom he would deal would bear a close resemblance to their *confrères* in Germany, Austria, or even in Paris, while a large proportion of the working classes would not seem to differ very widely from many he had already seen in several districts in the Austrian or German Empires.

¶ Nevertheless, in no part of Europe, perhaps, are the real conditions of existence more strikingly national than in Russia. The erroneous idea that so many, even observant, visitors to Russia are apt to bring home with them is due to their failure to grasp one most important feature in Russian life. Few people in England realise that there are two Russias, and that the gulf that separates them is as wide as that which intervenes between the England of the present day and that of our forefathers of three centuries ago. Still fewer, perhaps, are aware that the great majority, even of the "modern" Russians with whom they may have come into contact, are living in these two worlds at once. Modern

Russian life, the only phase of the national existence that the ordinary visitor ever sees, whether on business or pleasure bent, is the outgrowth of the reforms instituted by Peter the Great, and copied from much that we are familiar with in Western Europe. The modern development of Russia has, it is true, grown with wonderful rapidity of late years, but it is almost entirely confined to the towns and the regions easily accessible by the railway. New railways are constantly being laid down, but Russia covers so vast an area that a glance at the map will suffice to show how large a proportion of the country must remain for many years outside their influence. Less than twelve per cent. of the nation reside in towns, not eight per cent. near enough to urban centres to be influenced by town life, while the remaining eighty per cent., people of every rank of life from nobles to peasants, dwell in regions that modern life and thought have as yet hardly touched to any appreciable extent.

Nearly every Russian, whether a more or less permanent resident in town, or living altogether in the country, is either a landowner or has some family interest in land. Of the Russian nobles no fewer than 114,716 are landed proprietors. The latest Russian statistics also show that among the classes regarded as distinctly "urban," merchants are proprietors of twenty-

six million four hundred and sixty thousand acres, and professional men, "citizens," etc., possess five million four hundred thousand acres. Besides these, nearly all the lower classes are landowners. Most Russian workmen, even in the towns, were originally peasants, and, in fact, a very large proportion of them still are for the summer half of the year. Each has his peasant holding, perhaps in some distant locality, which the law will not permit him to sell or to be deprived of ; and when work is slack he goes back to his little farm and his family in his native village. The prosperous tradesman and his sleek assistants, who look to the casual observer as though they at least must be essentially a product of modern town life, are almost certainly landowners somewhere in Russia, and very probably are "peasants," too. So, too, perhaps is even the wealthy and highly educated banker, to whom the visitor has received a justly valued letter of introduction. That fact he will assuredly not be told, nor, if invited to his house, could he find anything in the courteous demeanour of his host and his family to lead him to guess it for himself. Very many members of the wealthy financial and manufacturing classes in Russia are of not distant peasant origin, and have never severed their family connexion with their native village holding.



↳ Nearly every Russian, therefore, has strong ties which bind him to the Russia of long ago, even though he belong to the relatively small class which resides habitually in the modern world. In the case of the vast majority, the life of old Russia, far from the fever of modern existence, touches each so closely and so constantly that, often unconsciously to himself, it affects the inmost traits of his character and family life. With it are, as a rule, associated the earliest impressions of childhood, and it is the foundation upon which the life of all classes in towns is afterwards built up. From the highest aristocracy downwards, town life and its ideals, notwithstanding the fascination they possess for the higher classes, are nevertheless mainly importations from abroad, grafted on to but not always assimilated with, that which alone is purely national.

It is not surprising that the importance of the influence of rural life in Russia upon that led in the towns should be so rarely realised by English visitors and writers upon Russian social questions. It is not only the great difficulty of travelling, the absence of hotels and of any kind of modern accommodation, that the visitor to Russia behind the veil has to meet the moment he has quitted the influence of the railwayed regions. The Russians themselves are among the most susceptible of races. Theirs is

the "youngest" of European nations ; and no one recognises more fully than they do how large a part of it is, as yet, untouched by modern development, notwithstanding the immense progress that has been made in urban and manufacturing centres during the last half-century. Of this progress they are justly proud, and the national *amour propre* is flattered whenever it can be brought to the knowledge of Western nations. (Of the great Russia behind the veil, however, the average educated Russian is most unreasonably ashamed.) For him there is nothing interesting or picturesque in the old-world life still flourishing there. It is, in his eyes, merely a humiliating evidence that Russia, as a whole, is still far behind other European countries in social progress. He generally regards it as something sordid and decidedly vulgar, a topic of conversation to be avoided by well-bred people. Notwithstanding the proverbial hospitality of the Russians, the very last thing he would desire would be that any foreign friends of his should see with their own eyes that this country life, which he almost invariably despises, really plays a highly important part in his existence, and has done not a little in forming his character. The Russian noble whom the visitor to St. Petersburg or Moscow may meet will talk freely to his guest of art and literature, of society gossip, or the latest Court pageant. (Of matters

connected with the country, or his estate—which, if he be not rich enough to enjoy the luxury of absenteeism, must occupy more than half his life—he will generally profess a lordly ignorance. Members of a lower social class in towns—manufacturers, merchants, tradesmen, and doctors—would be even more anxious to impress upon the foreigner their complete ignorance of anything so commonplace and vulgar as the breeding of cattle or the cultivation of the land. )

And yet, perhaps, the Russian would find to his surprise that in this despised “old-world” life there is much more with which the Englishman would be in sympathy, and in which he would take a deeper interest, than in the purely artificial existence that the Russian is so apt to regard as the highest development of modern civilisation.

Perhaps, too, the Englishman might find that his Russian friend had risen considerably in his estimation, and revealed many pleasing traits of his real character that he would never otherwise have guessed at, could he see the uniformed and highly decorated *habitué* of the most fashionable salons when the exigencies of his fortune compel him to quit the gaieties of the capital and return to his country life once more.



## CHAPTER II

### THE LANDED PROPRIETOR'S HOME

NO contrast could well be greater than that presented by the life of the typical Russian noble in town and his normal existence upon his estate in the country, and nothing could show more strikingly the versatility of the Slavonic character than his ready adaptability to either mode of life. No sooner has he quitted the nearest railway station, and completed the long and wearisome journey of often a hundred miles by road that has brought him to his home, than the man himself seems to be transformed. It would be more correct to say that he has left behind him, as here unneeded, nearly all that he had so carefully acquired in the society he had frequented in St. Petersburg or Paris.

Making his acquaintance, and that of his neighbours, both landowners and peasants, first in the purely Russian atmosphere of their country homes, we shall be able to understand many traits of the national character that seem almost

inexplicable when viewed in the light of modern town life alone. Here we shall meet with the same people, or representatives of the same classes, as we shall find again when dealing with Russian life in town, but the *habitués* of the most fashionable salons, the officials, civil and military, the merchants and manufacturers, the professional men and the working classes, will all appear to us in a truer and, perhaps, more pleasing light, than if we had not previously had an insight into this important—but little known—phase of their existence.

Once back in his distant home, our Russian friend is a Boyard like his fathers before him. Most probably a group of peasants will be waiting to welcome him when he alights; and as they bend to kiss his hand, or the older ones kneel to kiss his feet,—just as they would have done in the old days of serfdom,—we may believe that the welcome is sincere. The relations of landowners and peasants are, as a rule, and particularly in more remote districts, much more friendly than is generally supposed. This is, above all, the case when, as unhappily is only too rare, the estate is unincumbered, and is also presided over by a resident landowner.

Before describing the proprietor's daily life, however, free in his own domain from all the conventionalities imposed upon him by society and the official world of the capital, we must

first take a brief glance at his dwelling. It will give us at once the key to much that is little known in Russian life, and even in the development of the national character. Almost everywhere in Western Europe the castles of the old feudal nobles, even when in ruins, or the *châteaux* of the modern landed proprietors, constantly recall some memory of the past. Like "the stately homes of England," they are still-existing monuments of bygone days, and even when ruined and deserted, are links that bind the present with the past.

In the rural districts of Russia such links can be found only in the lives and habits of the people. Rarely indeed can any material evidence be found of the life of even a century ago, and so far as that offered by buildings is concerned, one might believe that rural Russia had no past. Over almost the whole of the country districts, wherever timber is obtainable, wood alone is employed in the construction of nearly every kind of building, with the exception sometimes, but not always, of churches. The average life of a wooden building rarely exceeds some sixty or seventy years in the Russian climate. Hence the existence of an old-established family residence, in which each successive owner has left some evidence of his own personality, a family monument which every member regards with a feeling of affection and pride, is a rare exception

in the rural districts. It is impossible to live long in the country without realising how much Russia has lost through the absence of these local centres of civilisation and refinement, which would also have impeded the perpetual drain of the national wealth from the rural districts to the capital or to foreign lands. No works of art, no objects of intrinsic value would be collected in a dwelling that might at any moment fall a prey to the flames, and in any case would hardly last more than a single lifetime. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. [The heart of the Russian noble has never been in his country home, and thus, to a great extent, has been lost the personal influence of each in his own locality that would assuredly have led to the development of a healthier national life than is possible under a purely bureaucratic government.]

The type of Russian noble I am describing belongs to what is, on the whole, perhaps the most important class in the Empire, as it is from its ranks that most of the higher class of officials—in other words, the administrative body—and even men of ministerial rank, are mainly drawn. [Their family position, apart from the official rank they may happen to possess, would correspond with that of a squire or country gentleman in England ; men who with us might be county magistrates or members of Parliament.]

[The house generally consists of a ground floor

only. The walls are formed of square beams from a foot to eighteen inches in thickness, laid horizontally one upon the other, and the end of each skilfully dovetailed into that of the adjoining one at the corners. These beams are fastened together by wooden bolts, about three feet in length, which are driven perpendicularly through them at short intervals. The interstices are calked with sun-dried moss saturated with pitch, and the whole is then covered with a sheathing of planks on the inside as well as the outside of the walls. These walls, painted outside and plastered within, are as impenetrable to the wintry winds as those of a ship, and far warmer than several times their thickness of stone or brick would be. In winter, whenever there is more than about twenty-five degrees of frost, the visitor, in his first experience of a Russian country house, is often startled by what he believes to be the report of a rifle, fired at short intervals all through the night. His fears are laughingly allayed next morning, when he is informed that the dreaded sounds were not due to a peasant insurrection, but merely to the action of the Frost King upon the beam-built walls.

The style of building and distribution of the rooms vary considerably, but there is seldom any attempt at the picturesque forms of construction so often adopted in timber-built dwellings in



Sweden and Norway. The foundations, for about three feet above the ground, are built of stone, upon which the timber rests. The roof is thatched, or, in more modern houses, covered with shingle, and the wide space it covers over the ground floor is generally occupied only as a huge lumber-room. The rooms are almost always very lofty. The drawing-room and dining-room are generally of large size. In the older houses, and also in the less pretentious modern ones, the plaster of the walls is merely coloured by a wash of rose, green, or blue in the drawing-room, and some shade of brown in the dining-room. {The furniture is comfortable, and generally home-made, or the product of the *kustar* peasants whom I shall describe later on. Unfortunately, there has recently been a tendency to discard the curious old-fashioned style of the national Russian furniture in favour of imitations of that produced by modern furniture dealers in Austria and France.} On the walls there will often be framed engravings, but rarely paintings, except sometimes water-colours, the handiwork of some fair member of the family, and set about the room the usual knick-knacks, dear to the feminine heart, souvenirs of foreign travel or visits to the capital. Sometimes, but generally relegated to a dark corner, we may come across an object of real interest, such as a painting on silk in the old Russian style,

representing a landscape or a pastoral scene, with coloured silks worked in here and there with so fine a stitch that, without close scrutiny, it is not easy to see where the painting ends and the needlework begins.

The bedrooms usually open one into the other, as is so frequently the case on the Continent, but communicate also with the corridor that runs through the centre of the house. The bedrooms are generally numerous, especially in an old house, for in the country, where hotel accommodation is practically unobtainable, unexpected, and uninvited, but not the less welcome, guests frequently arrive ; friends, for instance, who are journeying to, or returning from, the nearest railway station. The hospitality thus unceremoniously demanded and gladly given, often to mere acquaintances or even perfect strangers, is one of the most pleasing features of Russian country life.

[As a protection against the severe winter cold, the windows are always double, one pair of sashes opening like doors outwards, and the other pair (which, however, are removed in summer) inwards into the room. In winter they are never opened, however, and are hermetically sealed.] The rooms are aired by means of *vasistas*,—one of the panes in each window arranged to open like a door. Owing to the severe cold outside, this is amply sufficient.

However clear the outer air may be, the moment the cold current rushes through the opened *vasistas* into the room, it instantly freezes all the moisture in the warm air it meets with, and deposits little heaps of snow and hoar-frost all over the furniture.

The Russian stoves are too important a feature in domestic life to be omitted. They are an adaptation upon a larger scale of those in use in North Germany. They are generally placed in the wall between two rooms, for the warming of which, even when large, a single stove is amply sufficient. They are monumental constructions of fire-brick, covered with ornamental tiles, and reach nearly to the ceiling. The lower part contains a chamber, about three feet in length, and a little more than half as much in depth and height. This is filled with wood, and lighted, when the flames rush upwards through the fire-brick passages which rise to the top of the stove near the ceiling, and then descend, usually two or three times, until at length the fumes and gases, which have transmitted nearly all their heat to the stove itself, pass into the chimney and escape. The wood is burnt out in about half an hour, when the iron door of the stove is closed, so that no cold air can enter. The whole mass of fire-brick, often weighing two or three tons, is now too hot to touch with the hand, and for more than

twenty-four hours radiates a steady degree of heat, amply sufficient to warm two rooms. In a large country house there are often ten or fifteen such stoves as these, which thus maintain throughout the whole of the interior an unvarying degree of temperature day and night.

Beneath the house, and equal to it in area, is a vast underground construction that plays a highly important part in Russian life. On entering, the visitor would find a long vista of brick-built arches, beneath which corridors run in various directions, communicating with a large open space in the centre, the roof of which is supported on pillars, while all along the wall are doors, locked with colossal home-made padlocks, which open into a number of storerooms. On closer inspection in the dim light, he would find, in the winter season, that the large central space was occupied by a bed of carefully dried sand, and in this are planted, as in a garden, but as closely as possible, an enormous quantity of roots for winter use,—carrots, turnips, parsnips, etc. In another part is a long line of casks, containing the half-fermented cabbage and beet (both roots and leaves of the latter), which form an important article of food for all classes in rural districts in Russia. Farther on would be found another large group of casks of salted beef, and others probably of fish, and then departments devoted respectively

to home-smoked ham and bacon, smoked mutton hams, and smoked geese, casks of butter, casks of linseed and other vegetable oils,—the imperative need for which at certain seasons I shall explain,—cheeses of various kinds, and a whole regiment of sacks of flour. To glance around one might believe that he was visiting the magazine stores of a beleaguered garrison, and this in reality it is. In such a household as I am describing, there would be not fewer than fifty or sixty mouths to feed every day. Sometimes the number might be nearly doubled, and provision has to be made for the whole six months of winter.

Leaving the underground storeroom, another corridor would lead us to the winter kitchen ; for in many Russian country houses there are two,—that used in winter being often partly underground, while the other, for use in the hot summer weather, occupies a building apart and is generally larger, as there are then usually more persons to provide for. Both kitchens are paved with brick, and very simply furnished, containing little else, beyond the necessary cooking utensils, than one or two immense deal tables and a few three-legged stools. The stove and oven are enormous, the latter especially, as, for reasons that will be explained, much more bread than even the large household requires has to be regularly provided every

week. There is no need for a store cupboard, as all that is required for each day is taken daily from the great underground storehouse adjoining.

There will also certainly be two servants' dining-rooms, and in many parts of Russia three, one of which is always in the house. The others are built outside, generally adjoining the summer kitchen. The necessity for these separate dining-rooms is due to the rigid insistence of the peasantry and the lower classes upon a strict observance of differences in social rank that would sometimes hardly be perceptible to a foreigner. The "first-class" dining-room is reserved for the superior house servants, including possibly the housekeeper, though she and the heads of one or two departments of the farm often represent a fourth section. The other servants and working people, who had never been serfs, take their meals in the second-class dining-room outside. The third-class room is intended for ordinary peasants, ex-serfs, working on the farm. Notwithstanding the accommodation provided by these three dining-rooms, however, the meals have sometimes to be served successively, to avoid wounding the susceptibilities of some other class division. The most respectable Jewish artisan or even tradesman could not eat with Christians, and in many localities there are communities of dissenters from the orthodox Church who refuse

to take a meal with others of a different faith. The "first-class" dining-room is fairly comfortable, and has a table and chairs ; in the two others the chairs are replaced by stools or benches.

The farm buildings and the workmen's *izbas* are usually situated quite close to the house, but a description of them must form a subject apart. The garden and grounds in front of the house are generally large, though, except when belonging to a rich proprietor, they are rarely kept in good order. In the latter case there are usually very large greenhouses, but these are chiefly used for the protection of kitchen garden plants during the winter.





## CHAPTER III

### COUNTRY LIFE IN SUMMER

TO the resident in Russia the contrast between summer and winter presents itself with a force that could hardly be realised by those who know these seasons only in England. The long-drawn-out period of spring with us makes us almost forget, when the warm summer weather comes at last, what the country looked like under the snowy veil that had disappeared months before.

In most parts of Russia there is no such long campaign between the opposing seasons. The conqueror finishes it all in a single battle. It is a meteorological Sedan, and the reign of the victor commences forthwith. Until the middle or end of April, the whole country has been for five or six months enveloped in one unbroken mantle of snow, while the ground beneath has been frozen to a depth of three feet or more. Often in less than a fortnight it is summer. The snow has vanished, except for a few heaps



that may remain in sheltered nooks, the ruins of some once mighty snow-drift. The sound of many waters is everywhere to be heard as the melting snow flows down to the low-lying fields and converts miles of country into a shallow lake, in which the farms and villages built on the higher ground seem to have been erected upon an archipelago of little islands. (For ten days or a fortnight all communication ceases with the outer world, and in that time empires might rise or fall, but no news of the event would come to trouble the mind of noble or peasant.)

Indeed, from this moment to the end of the short summer, no one would have time to think of falling empires, for there is preoccupation of a far more pressing kind,—how to utilise every moment, until at length, in another campaign as short and decisive, the Frost King has avenged his Sedan, and for six weary months binds his late victor in chains of ice. (From early dawn till dark peasants and farmers, horses and oxen, are working almost incessantly, for through the length and breadth of the land there is the one great dread, that when the short time of grace is closed, the piteous wail—but too often heard in Russia—should be raised again : “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved !” )

Everywhere there is hurry. The very birds

are flocking to their nests, and carrying twigs and moss with an untiring zeal that more self-possessed British birds would consider undignified. They have no time for singing yet. That may come a little later, when their households are in order, but their battle-cries resound on all sides. The need for haste is urgent, honesty is forgotten, and many find it easier to rob a weaker neighbour's nest than to seek moss and twigs for himself. Even inanimate nature is in a hurry. A few days after the frost has disappeared all the trees are in leaf, and as the waters drain off from the flooded fields, they appear a mass of flowers. Often within the space of a few yards I have seen the ground a blaze of flowers, and butterflies and dragon-flies skimming over or resting upon heaps of snow that not even the fierce rays of the sun have had time to melt.

For the landed proprietors this brief summer season is one of deep anxiety. The lists published by the Government show that the lands of the great majority of the nobles are mortgaged almost to their full value ; often, indeed, from the depreciation of agricultural land the debt far exceeds the present value of the estate. The lands of but very few are quite unincumbered, and in the case of considerably more than half nothing but the most strenuous exertions could save them from ruin. The efforts of

every available member of the family must be utilised ; and as no small share of the burden falls upon the mistress of the house, we will take her self-imposed duties first.

I shall have to ask my Russian friends to pardon me if I introduce the *Khazyaeeke* to them in the very last place with which, in accordance with the conventional ideas of St. Petersburg society, she would wish to be in any way associated. I shall be forgiven when I remind them that the very meaning of the English word "lady" recalls a period in our own history when, as we learn from the story of Elizabeth Woodville, the Queen of Edward IV., gentlewomen of high rank were not above superintending all the details of domestic life.

It is early morning, and the *Khazyaeeke* is just beginning her round of daily duties, by an inspection of the different departments that fall to her share of the general administration, commencing with the kitchen. Simply dressed, probably in a gown of some homespun fabric, without a bonnet, but with a peasant's kerchief tied over her head, she is giving her orders to a group of a dozen barefooted and scantily-clad peasant women and girls. She has drawn her skirts tightly around her, for one of the peasant women is washing the brick floor by throwing pails of water over it, and then mopping up the inundation with a huge

piece of canvas at the end of a broomstick. This instrument is used pretty much as a flail would be in thrashing corn. The *Khazyaeeka* is laughing, scolding, threatening, and laughing again, while the peasants, all talking at once, are explaining, expostulating, and laughing too. Perhaps a peasant maiden, unhappily caught in some high crime and misdemeanour, unable to attract attention in the babel of voices in any other way, has knelt down on the soaking floor and, kissing the hem of her mistress's dress and her feet, with streaming eyes and dishevelled hair is pleading for forgiveness. The matter is probably a very trifling one, but with these children of nature tears and laughter follow each other in quick succession.

Having inspected the stores that had been taken out by the housekeeper for the day's consumption, the *Khazyaeeka* would probably pick her way across the cobble-stoned yard, stepping over the deep drain in the centre to give a few directions to the *Storoge*. This functionary is usually the least-skilled personage in a country household. The unfortunate man who occupies this position has generally been employed in various capacities in the domestic service, and in all has been found wanting. Step by step, usually quite contentedly, he has gone along the downward grade, until at length, in the capacity of the *Storoge*, he has reached his

level, his duties being those of a watch-dog by night, and a hewer of wood and drawer of water by day. The first of these duties is not arduous. It consists merely in placing a sack of straw outside the storeroom door, in the corridor adjoining the winter kitchen, and going to sleep upon it, very frequently with what in the morning will be an empty *vodka* bottle beside him. His occupation by day entails severer labour. Unless the estate lies in a part of Russia where the forests are already exhausted, he will generally be found at work beside an enormous stack of wood, which he is sawing into billets just long enough to enter a Russian stove. Even in summer the amount of wood consumed in cooking, and for other purposes, is immense ; and in a large house the duty of sawing the logs would be nearly sufficient to occupy one man's entire time. Besides this, it is his duty to fill the water-cart at the well, a few hundred yards away, and bring as much as is needed for household requirements. These Russian wells have a very old-world and picturesque appearance. The water is raised by means of a long pole, with a heavy stone or sack of sand attached as a counterpoise, working like a lever, exactly on the same principle as is employed in Egypt. The well, it is needless to say, is here, as it has been for thousands of years all the world over, the favourite trysting-place for village youths.

and maidens, as well as the centre where all the scandal of the community is discussed. "Had wells but ears and tongues," says an old Russian proverb, "not all the water they contain would put out the fire."

On the other side of the yard there is probably an outhouse, where some further directions might have to be given. Here a group of bare-footed women and girls might be seen, seated on the ground, busily occupied in picking off the outer leaves of cabbages, and throwing the solid hearts into a cart waiting to receive them.

[These women would not be servants, but peasants from the neighbouring village. In lieu of payment in money they receive the outer leaves to take home for their own use. The purpose for which the hearts are required I will describe presently.]

Here the *Khazyaeka* would have to run the gauntlet of innumerable requests : permission to gather firewood in the forest, milk for a sick baby, timber for a roof that is falling in, or, perhaps, the loan of a pony and cart, to take a patient to the doctor in the nearest town. Endless inquiries have to be made, for the peasants seem to believe that the resources of their former owners are inexhaustible ; and once more, amid the most fervent asseverations of the truth of their story, the *Khazyaeka* must submit to have her hands, her dress, and her

feet kissed again and again, while those who have no requests to make sit stolidly plucking their cabbage leaves. If we followed the cart containing the solid white hearts of the cabbages, we should come to another low building a few hundred yards away, in which a number of women and girls would be engaged in the important work of preparing fermented cabbage for winter use. The cabbages are cut in pieces, and then placed on a long, low table, where they are chopped up by means of a knife bent in the form of the letter S, in the middle of which a heavy wooden handle is placed. The chopped cabbage is then put into casks and tightly pressed down, a little salt being added. In a few days, when the fermentation has reached the proper point, the casks are carefully closed, and removed to the storehouse for winter use.

{This fermented cabbage is one of the most important articles of food in Russia. It is cooked in a variety of ways, and in soup, forms, with rye-bread, the staple food of the peasantry and working classes in town and country. It is by no means unpalatable, though rather sweet, from the sugar developed by fermentation.}

The dairy may perhaps next claim the attention of the *Khaz yaeeka* ; and if she has grown-up daughters, she has probably placed this important department under the superintendence of

one of them. Most Russian girls of this class, after receiving a good education at school or at home, supplemented, when the family means permit, by a tour abroad, spend a year or two in a farming or dairy school. The instruction given in these schools is now very thorough, and in several, especially in Courland, embraces almost every subject that could be of use to a farmer's or a Russian landowner's wife. It would, indeed, be an almost ideal preparation for an English girl who contemplated passing her life in any of our own colonies. Few Russian girls, however, attempt to take up all the subjects taught, as this would occupy several years. They embrace, not only almost everything that would naturally fall under the control of a farmer's wife, but even subjects as far apart as spinning and home-weaving of a great variety of fabrics, "first help" in case of accidents or sudden illness, and the care of infants and young children. In most cases where there are several daughters—and in Russia families are generally very numerous—each would take up a different specialty. In the household of a more wealthy landowner these departments would be presided over by women who had obtained a diploma in the same schools. Very frequently they would be the equals of their employers, so far as birth is concerned. They would not, however, be treated as members of the family if the proprietor of the estate



held any important official rank,—the only social distinction among the Russian nobility that really counts. In many of the schools a special costume is adopted,—a blue serge or cotton dress, with white linen cap and linen sleeves. On leaving the school, after taking a diploma, many Russian girls continue to use the same dress in their own homes while engaged in their respective departments. It is, in fact, a uniform recognised by Government, which no one would be permitted to wear who had not obtained the diploma.

The dairy is usually a separate building, placed at some distance from the house, and now very frequently is quite equal to the best to be found among Danish farmers, who have hitherto been the most dangerous competitors of British agriculturists. [This is mainly due to the efforts of a patriotic Russian, M. Vereschagin, who for years has travelled all over Europe, and, by inviting specialists to settle in Russia, has succeeded, among other reforms in this department, in introducing the manufacture of excellent imitations of an immense variety of French, Swiss, and other cheeses.] Aided subsequently by the Government and the *Zemstva* (local bodies that correspond with our English county councils), instruction in this branch of rural industry has led to the most satisfactory results, and Russian cheeses are now largely exported. No small

quantity, indeed, now reaches England, but it is almost always sold as of genuine Swiss or French origin. To keep up this degree of excellence requires no little care and the strictest supervision, above all, as the young head of the department must entrust the work of the dairy to peasant women and girls, whom she must herself instruct in the very first rudiments of the art. No wonder that for the wives and daughters of the vast majority of resident landowners there are but few of the pleasures of life possible that members of their class in other countries would consider essential to their daily life.

There is yet another department that the *Khazyaeeke* would probably have to visit, in which the preparation of dried vegetables and fruit for sale, and also for home use in winter, is carried on. On the estates of a large number of the less wealthy landowners, this industry is the source of a very important part of the family income. In winter fresh vegetables of any kind are, of course, unobtainable in Russia, and the art of preserving them by a special drying process has been carried to great perfection. It forms one of the subjects taught in the agricultural schools for which a diploma is granted. Like the dairy, this department is very frequently in charge of one of the landowner's daughters, and in certain seasons entails a vast amount of very arduous labour. It is carried on in a separate

timber-built construction, generally at some distance from the others, to avoid risk from fire during the drying process. A large number of ovens of various kinds are employed, and the greatest care has to be exercised in regulating the temperature and the length of time during which different vegetables must be subjected to the current of hot, dry air. In autumn, enormous quantities are sent to all the large towns, and, when skilfully preserved, it would be almost impossible to distinguish them, on their being served at table, from those that are fresh from the garden. The drying of fruit is an even more essentially Russian industry. Not only plums in the form of prunes are dried and prepared in a great variety of ways, but also cherries, currants,—red and black,—gooseberries, strawberries, and raspberries. The last three are generally candied ; and those prepared in a special way, with honey instead of sugar, are exceedingly delicious. Dried fruits are sent in immense quantities to the large towns, and now also to Germany, France, and Austria. They are generally packed in neat and very prettily ornamented little birch-bark hampers, woven on the estate, containing about two or three pounds. Another industry that might very likely be carried on in the same department, and would certainly be under the control of the ladies of the household, is the manufacture of fruit wines, for which

there is a great demand in Russia, partly on account of the high duty imposed upon those imported from abroad. [A very great variety of wine is produced from many different kinds of fruit, and their production is often an important source of revenue.] For some of the finest descriptions as much as £2 8s. the dozen is frequently obtained.

In this hurried survey, we have only glanced at a few of the duties that would necessarily have to be undertaken by the wife of the proprietor of an estate of moderate size, whose income was mainly dependent upon its produce. There are many more, but as they belong more properly to the winter season, or to the general administration of the estate, they will be mentioned later. In this long summer day there is but little time for family intercourse. Even meals must be taken on the wing. [The head of the household is very probably driving over the estate, for, as we shall see, there is much that demands his careful and incessant supervision, if he is not wealthy enough to delegate these duties to a land agent. His elder daughters have very likely asked for their meals to be sent to them, if there is urgent work to be seen to that they dare not leave in inexperienced hands. The grown-up sons are probably far away, railway or mining engineers, or holding some Government appointment perhaps in Turkestan or

Siberia.] The younger sons would be still grinding at college, and often during the vacation, with private teachers, for their examinations. The younger children, their governess, and sometimes the *Khazyaeeke* herself, are frequently the only members of the family to assemble in that deserted dining-room during the working hours.

But at length the day is over. If the family has met at all, it will have been at supper ; and when the repast is finished, in accordance with the pleasing old Russian custom, still universal everywhere, all the children rise, and as the *Khazyaeeke* leaves the room, each steps forward to kiss the mother's hand. If any guests were present they would do the same. The night in summer is generally too hot to remain indoors, and the family passes through the drawing-room window to the wooden balcony. In the old days, the serfs assembled every morning on the grass-plot in front of that balcony to receive their orders for the day's work, or to proffer their request for some gift or favour. By force of habit, the old freed serfs and the younger generation come there still, often in a deputation of ten or twenty, to crave some favour, and will stand for hours, cap in hand, in statuesque immobility, until the *Khazyaeeke* or *Khazyaeeke* has caught sight of them and comes to hear their requests. But there are no peasants to disturb them upon this summer's night. At this

season they have to work for dear life from sunrise to sunset ; and as they have no time to come and present their petitions, the *Khazyaeen* and his wife are left in peace. A servant enters presently with a *samovar*, and hands round the tea and a basket of the candied fruit I have described. The *Khazyaeeke* lights a cigarette, and if, as often happens, her mother or mother-in-law is a resident in the *château*, she will follow her example. The old lady is probably of an aristocratic type, which recalls quite a different world, for her memory will go back to the days when the fortunes of nobles were fairly prosperous, before the advent of railways and the abolition of serfdom. Sitting very straight in her armchair, the white-haired old dowager will probably converse in French, for in her young days it was the Court language, and the children of nobles would often be punished by their parents for speaking so vulgar a tongue as Russian,—the language of serfs and servants.

The *Khazyaeen*, who in St. Petersburg would have seemed to have no thought or care for anything beyond the doings of the Court, society, or cards, stands moodily puffing at his cigarette, and mentally calculating how large the deficit in his revenue will have become this year. It is past ten o'clock, but the sky is still resplendent with the rich gold and crimson of the Russian sunset, that will not have had time to fade

entirely away before its glories are renewed with the glow of the sunrise. The air seems filled with the strange, weird cries of the night-birds, mingled, if the estate be in North-western Russia, with the clattering bills of the storks that have built their nests close by, while bats flutter to and fro over the balcony. The swifts and swallows have gone to rest at last, but their place is taken by the night-jars, seen but for an instant as, with their strange cry, they sweep close to the heads of the occupants of the balcony with almost the swiftness of a rifle ball. Far away the voices of peasants are to be heard, singing a strange refrain—an eerie melody of only a dozen notes, repeated again and again, in a minor key—as they wend their way home to snatch a few hours' rest. An hour later, all sound of humanity is hushed, when a loud whistle rings through the midnight air. It is the night-watchman going his rounds. That signal to the *Khazyaeen* and the *Khazyaeeke*, repeated whenever he passes their window, is an assurance to them, from the man whose duty it is to give instant alarm in case of fire, that all is well, and that they may rest in peace.



## CHAPTER IV

### STRADA

PERHAPS, after all, the Russian noble may be pardoned if he has no such love for his estate, when it is the sole source of his revenue, as the English country gentleman has for his paternal acres and his ancestral home. One single Russian word explains this more fully than could be done by many pages of description. If a Russian wishes to speak of the tortures borne uncomplainingly by a martyr, or the very extremity of harassing labour or suffering, the word he employs in each case is derived from the same root as *strada*, the labour of the agriculturist. More than eighty millions of Russians are personally engaged, or directly interested, in the cultivation of the land. For them the *strada* of the summer season, and *stradat*, to suffer anguish, are inseparably allied. For one and all—peasants, farm bailiffs, farmers, and agriculturist landowners and their families—from the moment when the frost relaxes its iron



grip upon the soil until it returns once more, the whole summer season represents unceasing toil from dawn to sunset, coupled with the dread that, after all, their labour may be lost. No wonder that the Russian peasant, deeply religious though he is, feels that not even the services of his Church, in blessing the waters, the wind, the land, and the crops, suffice to ensure the success of his mortal efforts, but resorts on his own account to superstitious ceremonies by which the malice may be assuaged, or the good offices secured, of the dispossessed divinities of pre-Christian times who still lurk in morass and forest, and in the night-time, invisible to human eyes, glide over his land, and penetrate his *izba* with a power to ban or bless more potent than that of the priest.

For the visitor, however, who has no vital interests of his own at stake, a summer's day spent in visiting the home farm and estate of a Russian noble is an experience that will leave many pleasing memories behind it. Except in the more northerly regions, the heat of summer is greater than in England ; for, as a rule, there is less rain, the sun is less frequently veiled in clouds, and in the short nights the earth has hardly had time to cool before the sun has risen again. The air, however, is pure and invigorating ; and especially in the region where the forests are still extensive, the odour of the

pinces, mingled with that of the hay and the summer flowers, gives to it a peculiar sweetness of its own.

The average size of a Russian noble's estate varies from fifteen to twenty thousand acres in the north—where, however, a large part would be forest and waste land—to from three to four thousand in the steppe regions. Far larger private estates, of course, exist—one for example, in Perm, having an area of half a million acres ; but as it is my object to present my readers with [ Russian life under its normal aspect,—and in very large estates the owner and his family would certainly be absentees,—I will presume that our friend's estate has an area of about ten thousand acres. Of this, perhaps half would consist of forest and waste land, about a thousand acres be retained in his own hands, and the remainder be cultivated under conditions that will introduce us to some very curious phases of Russian life.)

Accompanying our host on his daily round of inspection, the first visit would naturally be paid to the farmyard. This would be only a few hundred yards from the house, and the buildings, all of timber,—being generally located far apart to avoid risk by fire, would cover an enormous space of ground. In the middle there would be an open square, around which the buildings would be placed. In the centre, there is probably a large pond, shaded by willow trees,



PEASANT WOMEN HARVESTING  
*From a photograph by the author*



which in Russia often grow to an enormous size. The Oriental-looking well, with wooden water-troughs for the horses, stands a little way off. Near the latter is a small platform, and over it are suspended a large board of *doub* (Russian oak) and two wooden mallets. [Had we been early enough, we should have seen this square thronged with peasants and peasant carts,—very small four-wheeled vehicles dragged by shaggy ponies, together with primitive agricultural implements of their own that they had brought with them. [Agricultural machinery of a modern kind would only be found in advanced districts and near the manufacturing towns, where labour is sufficiently expensive to render its use advantageous. Here, as we shall see, a system is adopted, that is to be found all over Russia, by which this expense is avoided. From the platform the roll-call is read over when all the peasants have assembled, and at the moment when the day's labour commences, the signal is given by a vigorous tattoo upon the oaken board, which resounds for a great distance like a drum. The same signal recalls the farm servants who are working near the house for breakfast at eight, dinner at two, and supper at an hour that varies according to the exigencies of the work in hand. The peasant labourers, however, have all brought their own provisions with them.]

We need not enter any of the farm buildings

now, for at this season nearly all would be empty. Besides the cow-house—for probably a hundred head of cattle—and the barn, an enormous construction, there would certainly be stabling for at least forty horses. This proportion seems remarkable, especially as the peasants have, as we have seen, brought with them an immense number of their own ponies; but we must remember that in Russia there are on the average twenty-five horses for every hundred inhabitants, against thirty per hundred of horned cattle. The cow-house we should now find clean and empty, as the cows remain all the summer in the meadows day and night, and are only brought home at milking time. At the moment when the frost breaks up, however, the condition of the cow-house is widely different. [The floor is generally dug about a foot lower than the ground outside, and slopes gradually to a drain that communicates with a brick-lined pit, which is filled every autumn with dried peat. The floor of the cow-house is also covered with blocks of dried peat, firmly stamped down, to a depth of about eighteen inches, and upon this the straw litter is laid. From the end of October until May, the cow-house is never cleaned out, but abundance of fresh straw is laid down daily. As a result, the floor is continually rising, and at the end of the winter the cattle are standing upon a

mass of decaying straw fully three or four feet in thickness. The object of this extraordinary system—unquestionably the cause of the great mortality among cattle in Russia—is to obtain as large an amount of manure as possible, straw being of little or no salable value in the country. )

The other buildings surrounding the square would probably be a row of *izbas* for the permanent farm servants, perhaps a *vodka* brewery, and a factory for shingle-making, but these will be described with the daily life of the people, by whom the business is carried on.

Leaving the farmyard for a drive through the estate, we should soon come to a peasant village. The entrance would probably be barred by a pole across the road, but this would be speedily removed as the bells of our carriage were heard approaching. The only inhabitants we should find on a summer's day would be a few old people, a swarm of half-clad children, too young for work and too big to be carried to the fields by their mothers, taking care of one another, and an army of dogs that strongly resent the intrusion of a visitor.

The *izbas* are crowded close together on each side of the road. They are straw-thatched, timber-built cottages, containing generally three rooms. One is the storeroom, filled with tools and agricultural implements. The other two are the kitchen and sleeping-room. The stove

is arranged to warm both these rooms in winter. The roof is low, black with smoke, and there is generally an earthen floor. The furniture in the kitchen consists usually of little more than a few stools, benches, boxes, and a table. In the sleeping-room there are frequently only long, wide platforms, placed near the stove, upon which the beds are laid. A description of the life and occupations of the peasants will come later, but several points must be mentioned here, as they have an important bearing upon the life and fortunes of the landowner himself. Very frequently villages and peasant lands will be found in the centre of a large estate, and the peasant holdings thus stretching across it in all directions often seriously hamper its successful administration.

Before the Emancipation, villages had been built and land given to the serfs for their support in any spot that was suited to the requirements of the landowner at the time. The peasants were his own property, and could be shifted about on the estate as he pleased, or sold to another landowner if they increased too fast. At the Emancipation, however, the village and peasant lands became the inalienable property of the ex-serfs, and very often these lands were considerably increased in size. In many cases, the land thus taken from the landowner amounted to a quarter or even half the portion of his estate



that was capable of cultivation. He received liberal compensation in money, it is true, but this, as a rule, was quickly spent in the gaities of the capital or abroad, while the estate, as a source of revenue, was greatly reduced in value.

[ These peasant lands, that must be constantly passed through to reach another part of the estate, are easily recognisable. As the families increase, the holding of each becomes smaller and smaller by constant subdivision; and as certain crops must in any case be grown on each, they are generally planted in strips across the holding, like a long ribbon, often a few feet in width. The peasant rarely sells any of his produce, and, as a rule, only plants what he needs for his family use,—rye, cabbages, potatoes, and as much flax as he can find space for. His *izba* provides him with shelter; and if only his holding can supply his family with food and flax for his home-spun clothing, he is fortunate indeed. The deficit can be made up only by working on the landowner's estate. How this work is done reveals a very curious feature of Russian life.

The peasants, whom soon after daybreak we might have seen assembled in the large square, are rarely labourers working for regular wages. Few landowners would be rich enough to afford such an outlay, though over vast areas of European Russia a man's labour for a sixteen- or

eighteen-hour day would not cost more than from eightpence to a shilling without food, and often less. The system adopted is really more advantageous to both sides. These peasants are in reality co-operative contractors. Arrangements are made in winter with groups of peasants, who form associations called *artels*, by which they undertake to carry out certain agricultural work for the landlord during the ensuing year, receiving a share of the proceeds in kind instead of wages. The advantage of this system to the peasants is obvious. However bad the harvest may be, it rarely fails altogether. With a bad harvest the price of corn would rise to such a point that the peasants' small earnings in money could not purchase food for the winter, and the failure of the harvest would make it more difficult for the landlord to pay their wages. Their share of the corn will, at worst, secure them against starvation, and they and the landlord must tide over the winter as best they can, and trust that the *strada* of next year may prove less fruitless. The disastrous results of famine in Russia are mainly confined to those regions in which the greater part of the land is in the hands of the peasants, and the landowners' estates are not large or numerous enough to afford them this relief. ]

The contracts vary considerably according to the circumstances in each case, but the general



THE RUSSIAN PEASANT'S IZBA





RUSSIAN PEASANTS



principle is always the same. [ Several such groups or *artels* of peasants will undertake, for instance, to plough so many acres of land, bringing their own horses and home-made implements with them. The landlord supplies them with the seed-corn and manure ; and when the corn is ripe, the contract is completed by the harvest labour and the carting of the corn to the owner's barns. The same system is adopted with cabbages, potatoes, and other field crops. ]

When the harvesting is over, the peasants collect the crops into a number of stacks or heaps, as nearly as possible of the same size, and the landowner, or his agent, then selects which of them shall form his share of the co-operative partnership, the proportion being generally about two-thirds for the landowner, and one-third for the peasants. This proportion, however, varies according to the quality of the land. ]

Leaving the peasant lands behind us, we should enter once more upon the landowner's estate, and now should find ourselves in presence of a new phase of Russian life, that of the class that represents most nearly the English tenant farmers. The reader must not be misled by the analogy, however, for the topsy-turvy conditions of Russian life make all comparisons with England impossible. We have already found farm labourers who receive no wages. Here we find tenants who often pay no rent or taxes,

and whose farms are sometimes partly stocked for them by the landlord. A visit to such a farm would present us with another example of the widespread co-operative system that plays so large a part in Russian life. Tenant farmers with capital, paying a yearly rent as in England, are quite the exception in Russia ; for those whose means would enable them to hire a farm on these terms would find it more to their advantage to purchase land for themselves, with the aid of Government-supported land-banks, especially of late years, owing to the depreciation in the value of agricultural land. ¶ The proprietor has therefore to fall back upon the profit-sharing system, and generally enters into a contract with his tenant, closely resembling the well-known *métayage* partnerships so widely adopted in France and Italy.

⌈ The farmhouse would be simply a magnified *izba*, and the furniture would differ but little, if at all, from that to be found in a prosperous peasant's cottage. ¶ The farmer himself would be merely a peasant, though, in most parts of Russia, drawn from a class that had not been serfs. The terms of the contract with the land-owner are not always the same, but the general principle is that the tenant provides the labour and the ordinary farm implements, while the proprietor contributes the land and buildings, and pays the taxes. ¶ The landlord also generally



pays the cost of insuring the buildings against fire, and a proportion of the insurance of the farm stock and produce equal to the share of the joint-undertaking that he is to receive at the end of the agricultural year. There is no fixed rule, however, for the live stock is sometimes provided entirely by the landlord, and sometimes partly by him and partly by the farmer. The same arrangement is made with respect to the seed for the various crops. Frequently the "farmer" who has no live stock of his own obtains it by a separate contract account with an outsider.

In many parts of Russia there are men who are owners of a large quantity of live stock, but possess no land. (Residents in towns of all classes, traders, professional men, doctors especially, and Jews in Western Russia, frequently buy a herd of young cattle, pigs, or horses, when a bargain presents itself at any of the local fairs. These animals are sent to a farm *en pension* for a year, and are paid for at so much a head. Of the amount received—and usually only a very low charge is made—the greater part is retained by the farmer, the landlord having the valuable consideration of the manure which accumulates during the six months of winter.) At the end of the year the accounts are made up, and the proceeds of the *strada* are divided between the landlord and tenant in the

proportion agreed upon. This proportion, however, varies very greatly according to circumstances, such as the fertility of the land and the value of the landlord's contribution. In most cases the proceeds would be about equally divided.)

The landlord, as we have seen, would generally find it quite impossible to pay all his labourers' wages in money, and (this difficulty would naturally be even greater for the tenant. He is, therefore, obliged to fall back upon the profit-sharing system in his turn. *Artels* of peasants make sub-contracts with him to cultivate certain portions of the farm, exactly in the same way as has been described in the case of the landowner; but as their recompense has to come out of his share alone, they generally have to work upon less advantageous terms than they would obtain from a landowner.)

Such a system necessarily entails an enormous amount of supervision on the part of the landlord and his agents,—who themselves require to be looked after,—as the tenant has endless opportunities for robbing him of a part of his share. (That the system should be so generally adopted is perhaps the best proof that the belief so constantly expressed by Russian nobles, that the lower orders and the peasantry in Russia are altogether untrustworthy, is somewhat of an exaggeration.) In this, as in many other

cases, Englishmen are very apt to be led astray by the vivacity of the Russian temperament, which renders it necessary for statements made in a moment of irritation to be very largely discounted.

A surprise visit to one of the farms every day, with a thorough investigation of some particular department chosen at random, plays no small part in the daily labour of the agriculturist landowner. Now and then a basket of eggs, a tub of butter, or a few cheeses will be unearthed, stowed away in a manner that certainly does look rather suspicious, and then commences a storm of whirlwind and wrath on the one hand, and deprecatory hand- and foot-kissing on the other, that to an Englishman would seem to portend the most direful consequences. Before nightfall, however, the incident will in all probability have been entirely forgotten on both sides.

Yet another form of profit-sharing must be mentioned, as it is now peculiar to Russia, although old records show that in former ages it was frequently adopted in many other countries on the Continent. Upon most large estates in Russia there is a considerable proportion of waste land. To bring this into cultivation, the landowner frequently makes a contract for several years with an *artel* of peasants, to whom he gives permission to cultivate a certain

number of acres rent free for four or five years, also supplying them with seed-corn, potatoes, and sometimes manure. For the first four or five years the *artel* retains the whole of the harvest for its trouble, but after that date, as the land improves in value, it hands over every year an increasing proportion of the harvest to the landlord. When fully reclaimed, the land is disposed of like any other portion of the estate.]





## CHAPTER V

### THE PEASANT IN SERFAGE

FROM the brief glance we have already given to the country life of the Russian noble and his family, the reader will have realised how large a part is necessarily played in Russian affairs by the peasantry. The Russian people are divided officially into five classes,—the nobles, clergy, merchants, burghers, and peasants. Of these five classes, however, the peasants, taken as a whole, must be regarded, from a national point of view, as the most important. While they form over eighty per cent. of the entire Russian nation, they are also the owners of three hundred and fifty millions acres of land, an area far exceeding that in the possession of all the other classes put together. [The importance of the peasant lands, moreover, is still further increased by the fact that while a large part of nearly all the estates belonging to the other classes consists of waste land or forests of but little value, on peasant holdings there is hardly

any ground that is not utilised. Of the dependence of the landowner upon the peasantry we have already seen something. Without their natural capacity for forming co-operative associations for almost every kind of work, a large proportion of the estates in Russia could not be cultivated at all, and almost all would be greatly reduced in value.

But the important part they play in the national life is by no means confined to agriculture. It has already been stated that in the towns, bankers, merchants, professional men, and even officials of high rank are often derived from the peasantry. In the manufacturing districts their labour is as indispensable in the industrial world as it is in the agricultural regions. The very same men who in the country formed an agricultural *artel*, and contracted for farming operations during the summer *strada*, will, a few weeks later, have formed an industrial *artel*, and will take up a manufacturing contract as artisans. Severe as their labour in the country is during the summer half of the year, this by no means absorbs all their energies. To understand the peasant life of the present day, however, we must go back for a moment to the old system of serfdom. Though it was abolished nearly forty years ago, it moulded the whole national life in a way that has profoundly affected the economic conditions of existence for the whole

Russian nation. The great majority of the peasants one meets with over forty years of age were born serfs, and notwithstanding the enormous change naturally produced by the Emancipation, a large proportion of the peasantry, especially those over middle-age, and particularly in the more remote districts, seem unable even now quite to realise that they no longer owe any obedience to their former owners.

Serfdom was not identical in all parts of what is now the Empire of Russia in Europe, nor was it, in the case of Russia, a legacy from the Middle Ages. Indeed, it is not more than eighty or ninety years since it acquired its worst and most oppressive form. The history of the development of Russian serfdom, though far too complicated a subject to be treated fully here, is nevertheless extremely interesting, as it shows that it is perfectly possible, in what is but a short period in the life of a nation, for communities of free men, enjoying complete self-government, step by step, almost imperceptibly, to lose first their individuality, and at length their personal freedom, in a social system that is, nevertheless, essentially democratic and communistic in form. In the whole of the old kingdom of Muscovy the peasantry were absolutely free, with the exception of the *kholopy*, who were practically slaves. The latter, however, were by no means a numerous class. They were servants in the households

of the nobles, and were really quite distinct from the peasants,—properly so called. The free peasantry—the great bulk of the rural population—formed separate and independent communities of the most democratic character possible. Each was a distinct little government in itself: every man of full age was entitled to vote, and all questions relating to the affairs of the community were decided at public meetings called the *Mir*. From the very earliest date, they seem to have possessed the same remarkable capacity for organisation. The right to occupy and till the land upon which they settled was obtained from private owners, or from the State. This right was sometimes paid for in money, or in the produce of the soil, but in the case of private landowners by a contract similar to that which, as we have seen, is still entered into by the peasants with the nobles, by which the little community agreed to give the proprietor a certain number of days' labour in each year for the development of his estate, in return for the right to occupy a part of it for their own benefit. In order to secure perfect equality among all the members of the community, in the amount of work done for the landlord and themselves, and in the payment of the tax when settled on Government land, as well as in the distribution of the proceeds of the harvest, the whole community was divided into *tiaglos*, or working units, consisting of one adult



man, a woman, and a horse. The amount of land that the community obtained was divided by the village *Mir* into as many lots of equal size as there were *tiaglos*. The *tiaglo* became thus the unit for the division of the land as well as for the rural population. A peasant with a large family of grown-up sons and daughters could, of course, claim several *tiaglos* of land, while a young and newly married couple would have to content themselves with one. As the young people grew up the *tiaglos* became more numerous, a new distribution of the land became necessary from time to time, and with each distribution the lots grew smaller and smaller.

The amount of land possessed by the Crown and the State in Russia has always been, and still is, far larger than that in the hands of private owners. It was generally virgin soil, and, being unoccupied, the peasants settled upon it could obtain new grants of land without difficulty as their numbers increased. Whenever, therefore, State lands were available in the vicinity of private estates, the owners were compelled to offer special advantages to the peasants to induce them to settle upon their property, and often provided them with agricultural implements, and even with *izbas* to live in.

Until the end of the sixteenth century the

system worked admirably. New land, until then, could always easily be obtained, and peasants who desired to do so could abandon their commune and "trek" off where they pleased, as their contract with their neighbours was only from year to year. But now difficulties began to arise. The communes were taxed as a whole, and whenever a large number of dissatisfied members left, the burden of taxation thrown upon each of those that remained was increased. Very many, indeed, abandoned their commune and emigrated elsewhere to avoid paying their share of the tax, repeating the same manœuvre a few years later. To remedy this, the communes unwittingly took the first step that led to their undoing, by strongly supporting the demand made by the nobles, as well as tax-collectors, that peasants should henceforth be prohibited from quitting their communes. It was thus that the *Kriépostnoy Pravo*, or "Law of Serfdom," was established. In the case of peasants settled upon private property the landowner could now impose his own conditions. These necessarily became more and more severe, for, as the community increased in number, a private estate was often compelled to support a far larger number of persons than were needed for its cultivation. At the same time there were also many nobles who required labour on their estates, which they now could not obtain, and

there were also vast tracts of unoccupied Government land which could no longer be peopled. The remedy adopted was another step downward for the peasantry. The Government decided forcibly to transfer the peasants upon its own congested estates to other districts where the population was less dense, pretty much as Scottish landed proprietors moved their crofter tenants, but, of course, in Russia the movement was upon a much larger scale. In this way the colonisation of the Russian steppes, hitherto quite uninhabited, was brought about. At the same time, the private landowners were permitted to transfer a portion of their serfs to the estates of other nobles who required agricultural labour, and to receive payment in money for the service thus rendered. Russian serfdom seemed now to have reached the last stage of its development. Bad as it was, it was unintentionally aggravated by the ill-advised action of the peasants themselves. Whenever a peasant girl married a serf belonging to another community she, of course, quitted her own and entered that of her husband. As the easiest way of accomplishing this legally, her friends generally requested their owner to sell her to her future husband's master. At first this was a mere formality, and only a nominal sum was paid, which was generally given to the girl by her late owner as a present ; but the principle, once

admitted, was very soon abused, and served in the last days of serfdom as a precedent, permitting nobles to break up families and sell any of the children, or any individual members, at their own good-will and pleasure. This right was at length abolished by the late Emperor Nicholas.

I have drawn special attention to the circumstances that contributed mainly to the conversion of free Russian peasants into serfs in the course of a few centuries, on account of the effect of this social revolution upon so many phases of Russian life. Serfdom is now abolished, it is true, but very many of the conditions to which it owed its origin still exist, and new and not perhaps less dangerous ones for the peasantry have been created by industry and capital in the towns. The tendency of the Russian peasant to submit with blind obedience to the control of his village government in the country, and of his *artel* when working in towns, renders him peculiarly liable to fall, bound hand and foot, into the power of unscrupulous capitalists, and especially foreigners of the German, Belgian, and Jewish races. In one direction, however, serfdom was indirectly the means of rendering a very valuable service to Russia, and to many thousands of the so-called *kustars*, whose extremely interesting and curious mode of life will be explained later. The nobles had



RUSSIAN PEASANTS OUTSIDE THEIR IZBA  
SHOWING THE CONSTRUCTION OF TIMBER-BUILT DWELLINGS



to provide for their serfs the whole year through, though farming operations were impossible in winter. Many of the nobles, therefore, sent some of the more intelligent of their peasants to work in the towns, or even abroad, requiring them, under pain of severe punishment, to bring back with them a certain sum of money, to pay for the maintenance of their families, who were kept meanwhile as hostages for their return. From Western and North-western Russia peasants were often sent with dancing bears, and, until quite recently, an old-established "academy" for the training of bears existed in Vilna. The greater number of peasants, however, took up a trade of some kind, and many were sent by more enterprising nobles at their own expense to learn new industries in Germany, Austria, or even France. In this way a vast number of new trades were introduced into remote rural districts. Among these were textile industries of all kinds, tanneries, cutlery, and metal-work of almost every description, cabinet-making, pottery, glass-making, and many more. Very frequently a skilful serf artisan would settle in Moscow or some other manufacturing town, where he could carry on his trade more profitably, paying his owner a fixed sum for the permission, but liable, at any time, to be called to his village community and to his ordinary labour as a serf.

No small number of these eventually made a fortune and had their families educated in a way that corresponded with their new financial position. In a few generations there were many who had acquired fortunes far exceeding those of their former owners, but none the less they remained "peasants," and, until the Emancipation, serfs, liable at any moment to be recalled.

At the Emancipation, many noble Russian families suffered a serious loss in the abolition of the right to claim an annual payment (*Obrok*)—fixed at their own good-will and pleasure—for refraining from compelling often highly educated men to return with their wives and daughters to the ordinary field labour of a serf, which their "owners" had also the right to stimulate by a liberal use of the knout.

This dark phase of modern Russian life has, however, a more pleasing side. Two noble Russian ladies and their daughters, known to me, who have been completely ruined, still receive a very liberal allowance, voluntarily paid to them as *Obrok*, with the utmost delicacy and good feeling, by descendants of their former serfs, now among the wealthiest men in Moscow. I have been assured by Russian friends that the practice is by no means uncommon, and a case has recently been mentioned to me in which a noble Russian family in reduced circumstances has for many years received a regular



annuity from an unknown donor, the yearly gift being simply marked *Obrok*.

Instances such as these, and many others that one constantly meets with, show that the relations between the nobles and serfs were often far less bitterly hostile than is generally supposed. In the country house of a Russian noble to whom I paid a long and very agreeable visit some time ago, there are still several old servants who, so far as it lay in their power, absolutely repudiated the Act of Emancipation, and refused to accept the Government donation of land to which they were entitled.

On the other hand, there were certainly many cases of horrible cruelty, especially during the last few years of serfdom. The idea became widely spread among many landowners that the land then occupied by the serfs was to be taken from them without any compensation, and this often led to their exacting from the peasants the maximum amount of work that they could possibly perform. On one estate that I have seen, some large, low-lying meadow-land was pointed out to me, in which the peasants, in the last year of serfdom, had been compelled to work up to their waists in water all through the autumn in some extensive drainage operations, only being permitted to abandon their labour when the growing thickness of the ice rendered further operations impossible. The result of the work

was fatal to more than a third of the serfs on the estate. Landowners of this character sometimes found themselves placed in a position of no little embarrassment when the emancipation really came. One wealthy Russian noble, for instance, happened to be taking a long journey on the night preceding the day when serfdom expired. He was in the middle of a large forest, when, just at the stroke of midnight, his carriage came to a dead stand. The servants appeared at the door and courteously informed him that they were then free, while the coachman considerably advised him to be particularly careful with the horses, as they were extremely nervous at night. A moment later, unmoved by his paroxysm of impotent rage, they wished him a pleasant journey, and, as he afterwards pathetically expressed it, left him, "*planté là*."

The Act of Emancipation, which not only freed nearly fifty millions of serfs, but also provided them with more than three hundred and fifty million acres of land for their support, was unquestionably the most stupendous scheme of national endowment that has ever been attempted. The peasants received the villages they were then actually occupying, and an amount of land sufficient to provide each family with an average of thirty-three acres. The land taken from private landowners for this purpose was paid for at once by the Govern-

ment, in the expectation that the nobles would employ the money for the more profitable development of the remainder of their estates. This part of the programme, however, was very rarely carried out. A small portion of the capital was invested in the development of industries in the towns, but in far the greater number of cases it was quickly spent, and only too often when it was gone the land was mortgaged to its utmost borrowing power, to maintain the same standard of life a little longer. Thanks to this unexpected accession of wealth, in a few years' time the great bulk of the Russian nobles were irretrievably ruined. The land purchased by the Government for the peasants is being paid for by them in annual instalments over a series of years, which has since been several times extended ; but this payment, constantly falling into arrears, is becoming every year more and more difficult.

In 1861, the date of the Emancipation, the land was amply sufficient for the requirements of the peasantry. Since then the population has doubled in many cases, while the land, constantly producing the same crops, is becoming rapidly exhausted. Wherever the peasants are entirely agriculturists, therefore, they have once more to fall back for their support upon their earnings on the landowners' estates, while once again they are in a great measure tied to the

soil, as they are reluctant to ask for permission—not always granted—to quit their holdings and abandon the land, which they have already partly purchased, so long as it will produce anything at all. The steady growth of the *kustar* trades—one of the most interesting and least-known features of Russian life—is the only remedy which can prevent large numbers of peasants from falling into a condition of serfdom differing but little from that from which they were emancipated in 1861. Wherever at the moment of the Emancipation the communal system existed, it has been retained, and the *Mir* divides the land among the members of the community, just as it did before serfdom threw its shadow over peasant life. In other districts of Russia, village communities were grouped together, so as to form an administrative unit corresponding with the commune. In all cases the land was given to the community as a whole, and the community as a whole is responsible for the payment of taxes to the Government. The *Mir*, or elected village council, which apportioned the land amongst its members, also decides what proportion of the taxes each member shall pay. These village communities, as we shall see, enjoy nominally a very extended form of self-government, electing their own *Starosta*, or village Mayor, the *Starshina*, or Mayor of the Commune, and other officials.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE COUNTRY PRIEST

**V**ARIOUS causes combine to make it generally very difficult for a Russian noble's family to enjoy many of the pleasures that one associates with country life in England. In summer, the stress of work is too great to permit of it, and even in winter, as we shall see, there is much to be done. Besides this, an estate which brings in but a very small revenue may often be of considerable size on account of forest and waste land, moors, bogs, and lakes. If we add to this the peasant lands, it is evident that a few estates often cover so vast a space that neighbours of the class of a large landowner are necessarily few and far between. Furthermore, Russian roads are not, as a rule, very inviting for long drives. They are generally little more than sandy tracks in summer, upon which are sometimes strewn small branches of trees and wood débris in the vicinity of forests, just as is done in Canada in the vain hope of binding the

shifting sandy soil. The bridges are often formed only of rough pine poles, laid transversely upon two pieces of timber over the numberless streams that cross the road. These poles frequently project far beyond the beams on which they rest, and a heavy cart or carriage that failed to keep exactly in the centre—as there is generally no parapet—would run the risk of tipping part of the bridge over and falling into the stream below. The nearest neighbours are therefore of the poorer classes, with whom social intercourse would be impossible.

Let us take the most important of these neighbours first. By the roadside, and at a short distance from one of the villages, we should see a landmark generally visible for a considerable distance over the level tract of country usually presented by the Russian landscape. This is the village church, one of the most strikingly Russian features of the rural districts. While there is considerable variety in the construction of Russian churches, there are always certain features that are essentially typical,—the curiously shaped roof, the balls and domes and cupolas by which the church towers are surmounted, and the brilliant colours with which the roof and part of the walls are painted,—generally bright hues of green or blue. I shall not describe the interior of the church now, for we shall have to return to that subject when dealing with the

religious side of the national life. For the moment, it is only the material, workaday existence of the Russian people that forces itself upon our attention in the hurry and stress of the summer season in rural Russia.

Behind the church a forest of wooden crosses, a few painted, but most of them blackened by age or covered with moss and lichen, marks "God's Acre," where many a generation of serfs and freemen have found at length the rest that their weary lives had never known. The moss on these crosses, as well as upon the tree trunks and *izba* wooden walls, would serve as a compass to direct us should we lose our way. On the side facing the north, the moss grows in luxuriant tresses ; on the opposite side the lichen is burnt black or slate-grey. Near the church is a long, low, thatched *izba*, with whitewashed walls, that, in the glaring sunlight, look like a strip of bleached linen with black patches upon it for doors and windows. In front is a wooden paling, weather-stained and broken, and perhaps a small garden with towering sunflowers and masses of peas and beans. Behind is an orchard, and beyond, a few fields and meadows and the church glebe lands, for the *izba* is the residence of the "Pope,"—the *Batushka*, as he is more politely styled, the word "pope" being far from complimentary in Russian. In the garden is a venerable-looking man with long

grey hair flowing almost to his shoulders, and a patriarchal beard, clad in a long violet surplice, and wearing the well-known cylindrical head-gear adopted by the clergy of the orthodox faith. As a rule his appearance would be decidedly imposing, kindly, and benevolent, but of a type that would reveal at once the fact that he belonged to a race apart, quite distinct from either noble or peasant.

Responding to his invitation, we enter the parlour, and while waiting for the tea he has hospitably pressed upon us, we can glance around. The floor is probably painted dark red or brown, with a few sheep-skin rugs and country-worked carpets laid upon it here and there. The walls are whitewashed, or tinted with some light colour, as in the case of the landlord's residence. The ceiling is sometimes plastered and whitewashed, and sometimes painted dark oak colour to match the floor. The furniture, exceedingly simple and country-made, probably consists of one or two painted tables covered with home-woven or village-made rugs ; straight-backed chairs, resembling those known as "Windsor" in England, but often rush or straw-seated ; a few armchairs with cushions ornamented with Berlin wool-work, and a small bookcase containing perhaps half a dozen books, a New Testament in old Slavonic, and a few volumes relating to services in the Church. The



*samovar* is brought in by a barefooted, smiling peasant woman ; and as our host pours out the tea, and gossips about the doings of the little world of which he is the ecclesiastical chief, we soon find out that the life of his family is perhaps even more lonely than that of the noble landowner. The position of the country parish priests in Russia is altogether unique, as they practically form a caste apart, quite distinct from the peasants on the one hand or the nobles on the other.

Every priest is obliged to marry, but only once. Should his wife die, he is bound by the laws of the Church to retire into a monastery for the rest of his existence. This law is not now always strictly enforced, however, and I myself know one priest who has been for many years a widower, and has nevertheless remained undisturbed in his cure. He enjoys, however, the "protection" of an influential official, and this may explain the exception made in his favour. Until quite recent times, the sons of priests could not legally undertake any lay occupation, and were therefore compelled to enter the priesthood in their turn. All class privileges and restrictions have now been swept away, but, as a matter of fact, the priesthood is still recruited almost exclusively among the sons of priests exactly as before ; at the same time, as many as possibly can do so now seek civil employment,

and the number would probably be greater than it is were it not for the almost universal prejudice that exists against the priests among all classes. Unfortunately for them, it is not easy to conceal their origin, even when following the profession of an engineer, a doctor, or an official. The family surname of most priests is distinctly ecclesiastical, such as *Arkhangelski*, the "Arkangel," etc. ; and as names cannot easily be changed in Russia, it points out the man's origin at once. There are also the physical peculiarities — perpetuated in a caste that for centuries has remained unmixed — and the frequent employment of old Slavonic words used in the Church services, in place of their modern Russian equivalents, that a Russian would recognise at once. Not long ago, a young Russian noble whom I know was brought into relations with a man seemingly in a good social position, who called upon him in reference to some business matter. The visitor was asked to stop to lunch, but hardly had he left the room than my young friend turned to me and exclaimed : "Why, I believe that fellow is the son of a priest !" with a tone of disgust hardly less than if he had said "the son of a Jew !" In the country, a priest might now and then be invited, as a matter of duty, to take tea with a neighbouring Russian noble ; but if the latter should belong to the more influential class, very rarely indeed, if ever,

would he be admitted to the family dinner-table. Even this small privilege would most assuredly not be extended to his wife and children.

Among the peasantry and the poorer class of nobles, the desire to avoid unnecessary intercourse with the priest and his family is often even more marked,—not in their case because they regard him as an inferior, but from the feeling, shared to a great extent by the higher classes, that he brings “ill-luck.” Notwithstanding the devotion of the lower classes to their faith, they are inclined to look upon the priest as a necessary accessory to the service in church, with whom it is not desirable to have much to do elsewhere; while both they and the higher classes—whose religious feelings are generally widely different—so constantly associate him, often unconsciously, with many of the saddest moments of their lives, that to meet with a priest at any of their social festivities, where it can possibly be avoided, is felt to be almost like meeting an undertaker in his funeral garb. In many parts of Russia, to come unexpectedly upon a priest, a crow, or a raven, under certain circumstances, would be equally regarded as an omen of coming death or disaster. It must be admitted that in many cases the low esteem in which the country popes are held is not wholly undeserved. Except for the purely ecclesiastical training they have received at the seminaries,

they are generally quite uneducated, and only too often their moral character is far from estimable. Habitual intemperance is by no means rare, and occasionally leads to scenes in which the spiritual pastor of the community plays a somewhat undignified *rôle*. I accidentally witnessed one such scene a few years ago, when a priest from a neighbouring parish called upon a Russian friend with whom I was then staying. Seeing that he was in a condition that rendered him quite unfit for polite society, the servants refused him admittance. Furious at this refusal, the irate priest commenced in a stentorian voice a series of anathemas against my worthy host that would have been not out of place in a Communion service addressed to sinners in general. Going out to discover the cause of this sudden uproar, I was just in time to see the reverend gentleman flying for his life down the garden path, his ecclesiastical robes streaming behind him, and half a dozen peasant servants in hot pursuit. From the expression of grim satisfaction on those peasants' usually stolid faces when they returned, I think they had thoroughly enjoyed having had so good an excuse for kicking a priest. On the other hand, a large proportion, probably the majority, are unquestionably conscientious men, doing their duty faithfully to the best of their knowledge, and frequently with great self-sacrifice. Poor as they are,

often with a large family to maintain, they are proverbially generous and charitable, and rarely indeed will a priest refuse to undertake a dangerous journey at night through the snow in winter, to visit a sick or dying peasant, though no earthly reward could possibly be gained by his service. Were the Russian priests only educated in a way that would enable them to give practical advice to their flock in matters of every-day life, they might render inestimable service to the nation, in improving both the material and spiritual welfare of the peasantry.

Apart from his ecclesiastical duties, the life of a priest is that of an ordinary farmer ; and we should find his wife and daughters engaged in occupations closely resembling those I have described as carried on in the *château*, though, of course, upon a smaller scale. Though often but little superior to the ordinary peasant, so far as education is concerned, the wife of a country priest is almost more cut off from all social intercourse with her neighbours than is her husband. She cannot associate with the peasants on equal terms, and is repulsed by those of a superior class. It is therefore not surprising that she should do all in her power to save her children from a similar fate ; and as at length the sons of priests may enter civil life, the Church now, for the first time in its history,

begins to experience some difficulty in providing priests for the country districts.

Hitherto it has been the universal custom for priests when taking holy orders to marry the daughters of priests. When the cure became vacant, through the death of the pope, or his enforced retirement to a monastery on the death of his wife, one of his sons-in-law would almost always be appointed in his place. The reason for this is that the house, though not the land, is the property of the pope, and when he is succeeded by a stranger, financial difficulties arise in connexion with his property that can be avoided by some family arrangement when his successor is his son-in-law.

It is one of the curious anomalies so often to be met with in Russia, that notwithstanding the low esteem in which the country pope is held by the nobles, whenever one is presented to a member of the Imperial family, Court etiquette demands that the Prince must kiss his hand. It is needless to say that the social position of the priest in towns is often widely different. Nevertheless, even in towns, the priests as members of the so-called "White Clergy" rarely occupy the social position of a clergyman in England, the higher positions in the Church being reserved for members of the "Black Clergy," or monks, from among whom only the bishops are chosen.

As I do not wish to touch here upon the spiritual relations of the pope and his flock, we will turn for a moment from the Church to the affairs of State in this rural republic. I have supposed that the headquarters of the commune, or *Volost*, are situated in proximity to the estate, and in this case, the Peasants' Parliament house, generally a large whitewashed building, would be erected here. The peasants elect not only the *Starosta*, or head of the village community, the *Starshina*, or Mayor of the Commune formed by a group of these communities, but also the Communal Council, and from three to twelve "magistrates," who have the power to try all cases, both civil and criminal, except those of a serious nature, that may arise among the peasants themselves. In case of a criminal offence, they can sentence their offending neighbour to corporal punishment with the knout or the birch rod. This form of punishment is not infrequently adopted, as it is inexpensive and convenient in a community which does not possess a prison. The dignity of these peasant judges is very strictly maintained by law. The penalty for striking a peasant judge on the bench, or at any time when he is wearing the bronze medal that is his badge of office, is transportation for a long term of years.

Besides the judges, there are other officials in these little republics, some of whom do not

belong to the peasant class. Among these is the *Pisar*, or secretary to the mayor of the commune. The functions of this personage are extremely important, for he is at once Prime Minister, Home Secretary, Privy Councillor, and Conscience-keeper to the *Starshina*, who, though the legal head of the State, relies mainly, like a constitutional monarch, upon the advice of his Ministers in all State affairs.

There are several reasons for this, though I need give but one, as it explains all the others. Official communications are frequently sent by the local government to the *Starshina* which have to be read, and replies sometimes have to be written. It often happens that the head of the State, the elected council of peasants who form the parliament, and the peasant judges are all as ignorant of the art of reading and writing as was Charlemagne.

The parliament, too, without competent advice, might easily, in perfect innocence, overstep its privileges, and bring down thunder and lightning upon the head of the luckless *Starshina*, while in complicated legal questions, such as the real ownership of a runaway pig, or the mysterious disappearance of a basket of potatoes, technical advice is no less necessary. This is provided by the *Pisar*, a man belonging to the burgher class, who has had such education as he could obtain in the nearest provincial town,



and has been tempted to accept this onerous post for a stipend paid mostly in peasant produce,—eggs, butter, cheese, etc.,—supplemented by cultivating a little land himself, and possibly dealing now and then in horses and cattle.

The court-house consists usually of a large hall with a table at one end. At this table are seated the judges—bareheaded, but wearing their sheep-skin coats, with their bronze medals suspended upon their breasts. The secretary is seated at the end of the table, and the litigants, witnesses, and the general public stand together in the body of the hall. The babel of voices is incessant, and in the midst of all the uproar, in which everybody present is a self-constituted jurymen giving his verdict, the secretary leans forward, and with uplifted finger endeavours to convince the solemn-looking judges in sheep-skin of the direful consequences that will result if his advice be not taken. The moment the verdict is given the court quickly empties ; the judges put their medals in their pockets and become ordinary mortals again ; and if, as is almost certain, there is a *traktir* (tavern) in the vicinity, the whole assembly will adjourn there to discuss the question once more.

To many visitors to Russia, who judge of the hotel accommodation of the Empire by what they have found in the few large towns they have visited, the *traktir* would be a revelation.

Over hundreds of square miles, in all parts of the Empire, the *traktir* would be the only kind of hostelry they could find in the rural districts. It is most frequently a long, low building, the roof and walls often being continued for some distance beyond where the house itself terminates, to form a shelter for peasants' carts and ponies. This shelter remains open all through the summer weather. The hotel itself faces the road, and contains a large barroom, with a few tables and stools upon the earth floor. Behind is probably the living-room of the family, with another room—sometimes two—reserved for guests. Only too frequently, however, there are many uninvited ones whose presence might be dispensed with, young pigs and chickens being by no means the most objectionable. One such *traktir*, in which, when living in Russia, I had to pass the night upon a good many occasions, to break a long journey by road, has especially impressed itself upon my memory, and is a fair specimen of this kind of hostelry. The guest-room contained several beds. I, of course, had the whole to myself, but for obvious reasons I preferred to lie down upon a row of three-legged stools, previously well wiped, placed some distance from the wall. The walls in this *traktir* only rose to about seven feet, leaving the whole space open beneath the roof, which covered the living-rooms and the stabling

alike. One morning when my coachman came to inform me that it was light enough to continue our journey, I became conscious of something touching my shoulder with a soft and gentle caress. It was only a chicken which had gone to roost there, while its brothers and sisters were on the table beside me, making a hearty breakfast of the remains of the supper I had brought with me.

Adjoining the *traktir* would probably be found the residence of another village personality—the *Feldscher*. This functionary is the peasants' doctor, elected and paid by them. He must have passed some preliminary examinations and have had a certain regular training before he obtains his diploma. He is not allowed to attend any very serious cases, except to give first help in case of accident or sudden illness, and must at all times act according to the instructions of the *Vratch*, a regular qualified doctor appointed by the Government, by whom he may be dismissed in case of incompetence. The system works well, for it permits medical aid to be given without delay in many cases where it would otherwise be quite unobtainable. The *Feldscher* is usually a man in the same class as the *Starosta's* secretary. His fees, also generally paid in kind, have a tendency to fall into arrear, to which doctors' bills seem to be especially liable all over the world. The Russian

peasant is always ready to help a neighbour with his advice, to the best of his knowledge, without expecting fee or reward, and cannot understand why the *Feldscher* should not do the same.

Sometimes, but not always, the little community would also possess a village bazaar. This would be a general store for the sale of groceries, petroleum, lamps, and tools required by the peasantry, together with cheap ribbons and trinkets for their wives; but these are generally supplied by "travelling merchants," who will be mentioned later, as they present a very typical feature of Russian life. The village school, where such an institution exists, I need not mention now, as in summer it would be closed. In that season the labour of all who are old enough to be trusted ever to reach the school at all, without playing truant on the way, is far too precious to be wasted in merely learning to read and write and spell out the old Slavonic required in the services of the Church.





## CHAPTER VII

### LIFE ON A LARGE ESTATE

**I**N so vast an empire as Russia in Europe there are naturally many variations of the types and forms of existence I am describing. The difference of climate, the distance from railway or urban centres, the greater or less density of the population, the extent of the forest lands, or in many regions their complete absence, and many other local peculiarities affect in various ways, and often over wide areas, what may be regarded as the normal types of national life in the rural districts. As an example of these variations, there are several governments in European Russia with a population of less than ten to the square kilometre. In one government there is not quite one inhabitant to the same area, while in the governments of Moscow, Kiev, Poltava, and Podolsk the average population amounts to from 130 to 170. In certain governments, while woodlands cover less than two per cent. of the surface (a smaller percentage

than in England), there are others, such as Vologda, in which forests occupy 86 per cent. of the land. Again, while in the central districts of Russia there are governments in which the peasants own more than half the land,—and in some cases, over wide areas, are the proprietors of the whole,—in Western and a great part of Southern Russia more than half is in the possession of private landowners. These, however, are exceptional cases, and do not represent the normal life of the majority of the Russian people.

Besides the official personages described in the last chapter, representing Church and State, there are others who play an important part in this little world of their own. Were the estate a very large one, and sufficiently unincumbered to permit of such an expense, there would be a general land-agent for the whole property. It is, however, almost certain that the proprietor would then be an absentee, and would hardly ever visit his estate. In that case the agent would occupy the rank of a landed proprietor; he would generally be a noble, and his life and that of his family would exactly correspond with that of the majority of Russian nobles whom circumstances compel to live on their property. For a Russian noble to be able to say he has never even seen his estates is something rather to boast of, for it is intended to convey the impression that his fortune is in a very

flourishing condition. Perhaps when that statement is made to a foreigner, further investigation might show a widely different state of things. Some time ago I was greatly amused to hear a young Russian who was dining with some aristocratic friends in the St. Germain quarter of Paris complacently remark that for his part he knew nothing of Russian country life, the demands of society and the Court taking up so much of his time that he had to leave these matters to his agent. An imploring glance that he furtively cast towards me a moment after was intended to prevent me from saying anything that would have revealed the truth. By birth he was quite the equal socially of his French host, but in reality he was his own land-agent. His mother and sisters gave their best energies from early dawn till night for months in each year to develop the departments that fell to their share in the administration, and, like himself, only at long intervals could enjoy the luxury of a holiday, while he—like the good, honest fellow that he really was, beneath this mask of make-believe—was toiling harder than any paid employé would ever have done to keep the family fortunes from complete shipwreck. Nothing is more remarkable than the anxiety so often shown by really hard-working Russian nobles to pose before foreigners as mere frivolous butterflies.

In the absence of a chief land-agent the proprietor would, on such an estate as I am describing, require the services of at least two sub-agents of far inferior social position. These men, whenever procurable, would be Germans, immense numbers of whom formerly emigrated to Russia as land-agents. This has become much more rare of late years, however, both because such men can now easily obtain far more lucrative employment at home, and also because no foreigner is now allowed to hold such a post in any of the Western governments within a certain distance from the frontier; the district in Russia in which formerly German agents were the most frequently employed. Failing Germans, German-speaking Letts from Courland are in great demand, and, being Russian subjects, no legal objection can be made to their employment. The sub-agent of the home estate would occupy one of the *izbas* I mentioned in the large square adjoining the farmyard. His pay would be from £40 to £60 a year, together with a certain allowance of bacon, potatoes, fermented cabbage, butter, and rye-bread. I have already mentioned that the vast ovens in the kitchen of the *château* have to provide far more bread than the actual inhabitants require. I may add here that it is the general custom to supply all the permanent staff of the estate with a fixed ration of so many loaves a week, and



this distribution is often extended to a number of pensioners as well. The sub-agent is generally married, and in this case the milk of one or two cows belonging to the landowner is always reserved for the use of his family. His *izba* would resemble in general appearance that of the pope, which I have already described.

[On many estates, especially where a serious attempt is made to improve the system of farming, there is often quite a little colony of Letts.) When the dairy is not superintended by a lady member of the family, it is very often managed by a woman trained in one of the Courland agricultural schools, and usually herself of Lettish race. The gardener, wherever fruit culture is at all developed, will almost certainly also be a Lett. As nearly all are fervent Protestants, this settlement in Russia sometimes leads to a little difficulty, as there is no possibility of their attending any religious service. An arrangement is therefore generally made when they are engaged, permitting them to return to Courland at least once a year to take the sacrament in one of their own Lutheran churches.

Upon every estate of any importance, there would certainly be at least one flour-mill. Wind-mills are exceedingly common in Russia, and form a striking feature in the landscape. Their general use is not due, as a rule, to any want of water, however, for streams and rivers

are nearly everywhere to be found ; but the general flatness of the country often renders the current so slow that water-mills cannot always be easily worked. Throughout the whole of the Jewish pale, that is to say, in the Western and Southern governments in which Jews are allowed to settle, these mills are almost invariably in the hands of men of Jewish race. This is preferred by the landowners, as they are able to obtain far better terms than they could from Russian millers. The Jew, having capital, generally pays a fixed rent for the use of the mill, and undertakes to grind a certain quantity for the landlord's use, free of charge. The Russian miller, on the contrary, takes the mill on the profit-sharing system, and pays no rent. As the corn he grinds for the peasants and little proprietors is paid for in kind,—one sack out of a certain number being retained as his fee,—this corn has to be sold often at a low price before the profit can be divided between him and the landlord, and thus trouble, loss, and disputes continually arise, as it is by no means easy to maintain an efficient control.

I have mentioned the *vodka* brewery as one of the features in the vicinity of the farmyard. This, if within the "pale," would certainly be in Jewish hands, probably taken by a man residing in the nearest town, and would be worked by paid employés,—Jew and Christian peasants.

The system of partnership entered into between the Russian noble and the Jewish *vodka* manufacturer is so curious, that I am tempted to describe it here, though it belongs more properly to the winter operations on the estate. In a field near the farmyard, we should see what closely resembles lines of strongly entrenched earthworks. Toward the end of summer, large numbers of peasants with their carts would be seen collecting here, and depositing enormous quantities of potatoes at the end of each of these mounds ; their own share having been withdrawn, as payment for their labour in cultivating the potato fields. A door at the end of each mound would be opened, and we should then see that it consisted of a long tunnel, lined with timber, and covered with earth to a thickness of three or four feet. This tunnel, the outside of which in summer would generally be a mass of wild flowers, is the storehouse in which the potatoes, from which the *vodka* is made, are kept from the frost all through the winter. { The *vodka* brewery is constructed by the landlord, and is let by the year to the Jewish brewer, who also undertakes to buy all the potatoes he uses from the proprietor at a price fixed in advance. } The residue remaining after the *vodka* has been produced is a very valuable food for cattle, and the whole of this the brewer undertakes to return to the landowner without charge. The motive

power required to work the machinery is generally provided by a team of oxen, as the work is done in winter, when water-mills in Russia are not always to be relied upon. These oxen are the property of the brewer ; but the landlord, for his part, undertakes to house them during the winter, and supply all the straw they can use for litter, free of charge. But the oxen have also to be fed on potato residue. What they require, therefore, is bought back by the brewer, at a fixed rate of so much per pail. He is allowed to keep as many oxen as he pleases, the landlord gladly supplying them with shelter and straw for litter for the sake of the manure thus obtained, when at length the stables are cleaned out in the spring. Formerly the *vodka* was sold in the *traktirs* and *kabaks* (taverns), but it must now be handed over to the Government, by which the retail dealers are supplied. This has been a heavy blow to the Jews, who had got the whole *vodka* trade of a great part of Russia into their hands, as the Government is now seriously endeavouring to diminish the consumption among the peasantry, and also insists that what is sold must be free from adulteration. Even with all these precautions, however, the *vodka* supplied to the peasantry more nearly resembles the strongest methylated spirit than anything else I can compare it to.

Another important personage on the estate is

the smith, who has always an enormous amount of work to do in the little community, in which, as far as possible, everything is made or repaired on the spot. His duties as a farrier, however, notwithstanding the vast number of horses kept in Russia, are only one-half what might be expected. Almost everywhere in the rural districts ponies and horses wear only one pair of shoes instead of two, only their forefeet being shod.

The smith is provided with a *kouznitza* or smithy, and an *izba* to live in, rent free, and generally with rations or a small piece of ground for his family to cultivate for themselves. He is also, except where wood is scarce, allowed as much charcoal as he needs, but this he must prepare for himself. In return for these advantages he undertakes to do all the smith's work required on the home farm free of charge, the landowner providing him with iron for the purpose. He is allowed, however, to work for the peasants and other neighbours for payment. This entails another responsibility on the part of the farm bailiff ; strict supervision, lest the landlord's iron should be used wrongfully. The peasants, however, when they require work done, generally bring a piece of iron with them from their own homes, or buy a suitable piece at the village bazaar. In any case the peasants' payment is almost always made in kind, and they will bring with them a pat of butter, a few eggs, some

flax, or a bag of potatoes ; and this the smith, if he cannot use it for himself, will sell in his turn to the bazaar-keeper.

Besides the smith, there are on most large estates a saddler and a carpenter, who work for the landlord upon similar conditions. These men will very rarely be peasants belonging to the village community, but members of a higher class than the ex-serfs. Indeed, in several cases that I have known they were "nobles," though there was hardly anything to distinguish them from the ordinary peasants. Most estates are also provided with a tailor and a shoemaker, and in Western Russia these trades would be carried on by Jews. The important part played by the Jews in country as well as in urban life, wherever they are permitted to settle, will be described later ; but I may note here that their wonderful versatility sometimes leads to curious results. As an example, on one property that I know, the tailor is also the barber for the whole community, and the saddler, besides being the estate-shoemaker, has also the health and well-being of all the clocks and watches under his especial care.

The poultry department, often in charge of a Lettish specialist, is one that naturally belongs to the government of the *Khazyaeeka* ; and upon many estates it is of considerable importance. [Russian eggs and poultry are now largely exported, England alone buying nearly a million

pounds' worth of Russian eggs every year. The poultry-house is a large wooden building divided into sections, separated by light lattice-work, for the geese, turkeys, ducks, and chickens, respectively. As much space as possible has to be given to them, for here they have to pass their weary days as best they may for the six or seven months of winter. However bright the sun may be outside, only the ducks and geese are hardy enough to be sent out into the yard for a few minutes' fresh air every day. The poultry-house is warmed day and night by an immense Russian brick stove, and sometimes by two when the building is very large. At the end is a window opening into the kitchen of the hen-wife, who can thus at any moment survey her multitudinous and noisy charges. In the summer-time she would only have the young birds to look after, as the others would all be away in the meadows until nightfall, in charge of a numerous staff of little *Pastooks* and *Pastooshkas*, as the boys and girls are called whose duty it is to look after the poultry, pigs, and cattle in the fields. Their labours at least are not too arduous. Most of the meadows are transected by rivulets or watercourses, and in the sultry summer weather, their scanty raiment suspended on the willow trees, the *Pastooks* and *Pastooshkas* lead an almost aquatic existence, only emerging from the water now and then, when some of their

charges show an inclination to stray too far afield.

The permanent staff of labourers and farm servants is larger than might be supposed, considering how much of the agricultural work is done by peasant *artels* coming from the neighbouring villages. These farm servants live in the row of *izbas* forming one side of the square near the farmyard. In their internal arrangements, these *izbas* resemble those of the other peasants in the villages. From a short distance, they are decidedly pretty. Their whitewashed walls glitter like ivory in the sun ; and in summer the thatched roofs of those that are more than four or five years old are frequently a perfect garden of ferns and wild flowers. Nearly all these farm servants are married, and their little cottages are generally swarming with children, for whom employment is found as soon as they are able to get about alone.

The estate is thus a little world in itself, and there is an enormous amount of work to be done that could not be contracted for. For example, even if the landlord does not cultivate flax and hemp for sale, a certain quantity will have to be sown for household use, and no crop entails so great an amount of labour. Not only the flax, but the seed also, plays a highly important part in the domestic economy of a country house. In describing the great storehouse cellar, I men-



tioned the casks of linseed oil. This is generally made upon the estate. During the two long fasts ordained by the Russian Church in each year, nothing of animal origin, not even butter, will be touched by the peasants for weeks together, and linseed oil forms an important item in their daily food. The preparation of the flax, the spinning of which will occupy so many of the winter months, is a task that is undertaken by women and girls belonging to the farm labourers' families. Though this is an outdoor occupation, it belongs especially to the ladies' department ; and many take no little pride in the skilful treatment of the flax destined for weaving the linen for household and personal use. This flax is prepared in two ways, according to the use for which it is ultimately intended ; and part is frequently brought to the *château*, so that the whole operation can be carried on under the mistress's eye. Part is simply laid out upon the lawn, and watered occasionally, until, by this means, and the dew at night, the gummy substance by which the fibre is held together has been somewhat loosened ; and part is steeped in water for a long time, until the same result is obtained. The stalks, which have to be well dried, are afterwards gently beaten upon a kind of wooden anvil, with a light oak stick shaped like a rolling-pin ; and great is the outcry when now and then a peasant girl is caught spoiling

the fibre by beating too vigorously, with a view of getting her work more quickly done. The subsequent combing of the flax intended for spinning into the thread with which the finer kinds of lace are made, or for weaving into linen for personal use, is as delicate an operation as dressing the *Khaz yaeeka's* own hair would be. The spinning and weaving of the more delicate fabrics would most probably be a part of the winter labours of the ladies of the family themselves, for Russian home-woven linen is a work of art, and much is of a quality that could hardly be bought for money.





## CHAPTER VIII

### PEASANT CHARACTERISTICS

WHAT has been said of the life led by the inhabitants of a Russian rural estate affords only a faint idea of the arduous labour that its supervision entails. This is not due alone to the number of separate and independent trades that are carried on simultaneously. I have mentioned a few of these, but there are frequently many more upon an estate of average size, of which some, however, give occupation only in the winter season. What renders the general supervision and control especially harassing and wearisome is the peculiar character of the Russian peasants themselves. Let me give a few examples of the trials of temper to which the curious mental and moral idiosyncrasies of the peasantry constantly give rise. It is but a poor consolation to the resident landowner and his family to know that the thousand and one *contretemps* that perpetually recur are not due to any intention to annoy on the part of the

peasantry themselves. Their results are exasperating all the same, and perhaps the *Khazyaeeka* and her daughters are the most deserving of sympathy.

When the peasants are working in their own way under the directions of their elected foreman or *Starosta*, there is generally but little to complain of. It is by no means the same, however, when they are set to work as individuals. Their intelligence appears to be essentially "collective," or rather their spirit of absolute obedience is so developed that when an *artel* is working under the *Starosta*, or a group of workmen is sent to do some special piece of work under the control of a foreman, they become for the time being simply his hand, and obey his instructions to the letter. Send three *moujicks* to cut a ditch, and they will immediately select one of their number as their leader. He will most probably do no part of the work himself, but merely direct the other two, who will labour contentedly the whole day through, and obey him implicitly. This absolute obedience—an excellent thing in its way—sometimes leads to very embarrassing results. It happened several times that I had occasion to give an order to some peasants in reference to some work they had to do upon a Russian estate. Returning two or three hours later, I found the men engaged in a ludicrously impossible task. My instructions had been

misunderstood, but, absurd as they knew their labour to be, they had toiled on just the same, and would have continued until nightfall, or until some accident occurred to stop them. "It was the *Bareen's* order." Their sole duty was to obey. This is but one of the many traces of serfdom that it will take several generations to eradicate. One of the greatest difficulties that the landowner has to guard against is due to the peasants' vague notions of the rights of property. This is not caused by any want of honesty on their part. It is simply a survival of ideas that were perfectly natural forty years ago.

In the days of serfdom, when the peasant himself and his wife and children were as much the property of the landowner as his horses and cattle, he saw no reason why he should not use other property, also belonging to the estate, for his own personal benefit. It was not stealing, for anything he took necessarily belonged to the person who owned him, just as much as it did before. Tools, agricultural implements, the timber in the forest, were all, like himself, the property of the landlord, and he would constantly use them, quite innocently, just as a child might take things belonging to its parents, with full knowledge that punishment would be entailed if they were used improperly. The idea of "stealing" never entered the serf's mind. As in the case of a child, if he got punished, it

would be for disobedience, because he had taken something he had been told not to touch.

In rural districts it is still often no easy task to make the peasants realise that all this is changed. It is the more difficult as very many among them do not regard the change as in any way to their advantage. In the youth or childhood of those who are now over middle-age things were very different. The serfs, it is true, were often punished with terrible severity, and treated with great cruelty ; but nevertheless the older generation of peasants are inclined to look back to the days of their youth with kindly feelings, something akin to those with which Traddles in *David Copperfield* recalled the memories of his schoolboy existence.

Most of the landowners then led patriarchal lives upon their estates. They were generally very easy-going, and the number of serfs was so large that the labour they had to perform, except at the moment of harvest, was far from exacting. Old serfs and proprietors who remember those days agree in saying that fifty men would then have been sent for to do a piece of work that ten or fifteen peasants would have to do now. The remuneration that each of these free peasants receives is almost the same as the serfs would have had,—simply what is needed for their maintenance. The estate was generally unincumbered, and the first charge upon its

produce was that needed for the support of the peasants. If the serfs were not properly fed and housed, the owner was liable to be deprived of the administration of his estate, which would then have been given to an official appointed by the Government to manage for him. As serfs, say the peasants, if they did not work their punishment was flogging ; now it is starvation,—that is the only difference, except that their labour is more severe. As serfs, they looked upon the produce of the estate as the property of the whole community, of which they formed a part. The landlord as their “ Father ” divided this produce as he thought right, and having set apart what was needed for their maintenance, kept the rest for himself. At the Emancipation all their right to a share in the produce of their late owner’s property was abolished. They received, it is true, a grant of land from the Government, but this land they must pay for by an annual tax. How are they to get the money ? They have now hardly any produce to sell. Their families have increased, and the land, which has constantly borne the same crops for forty years, is exhausted. Except by going to work in the towns, or in the *kustar* trades, to be described later, it is only by returning once more to work upon their late owners’ estates that they can find remunerative employment. But alas ! everything now is changed. The

estate is heavily encumbered with debt, and cannot be worked in the old, easy-going fashion. The landlord has long ago spent in the capital or abroad every *kopeck* that he had received from the Government for the portion of the land that was given to them, and which they are now obliged to pay the Government for in money. But the landlord has now no money to give them for their labour. (His estate is not only mortgaged to its full value, but is also much smaller than it was before the Emancipation, when the peasant lands were taken from it. The greater part of the labour he can pay for only in the actual produce of the fields, and when the peasant takes a sack of potatoes or a cart-load of hay to the nearest country town to sell, the Jew dealers in Western Russia, and the German dealers elsewhere, knowing he can get money only from them, form a "ring," and either buy his farm produce for a quarter of the market price, or offer him a loan at an exorbitant rate of interest.)

The peasants refuse to recognise a bargain which in their opinion has left them far worse off than they were before, and believe that their right to be maintained by the produce of their late owner's estate, and to use anything they need clearly belonging to that estate, has remained unchanged. The Russian peasant is in reality exceptionally honest. There are few



countries on the Continent in which theft of personal property is so rare. Were a landowner to lose his purse or his watch, a peasant who had found it, even though he were nearly starving, would almost certainly restore it to him. Many a peasant who was not starving would nevertheless not hesitate to carry off a basket of potatoes or a piece of bacon, if he happened to wish for it and could escape detection. His conscience would be quite at rest, for he would consider that such property was not personal, but belonged to the estate. Without constant supervision, the landowner, who would need no lock to protect any valuables of a personal nature in his own home, would find that the peasants were coolly appropriating to their own use his farming implements and tools of every kind, cutting whatever timber they required in his forests, and sending their cattle to graze upon his land. If he has a boat on a neighbouring lake, it will constantly be used by the peasants, in spite of all his efforts to prevent it. The idea of trespass is practically unknown. If the route through the garden chances to be the easiest way to the village, peasants with their carts will continually pass through. This is not done with any intention of insolently asserting what they believe to be their rights. When caught and called back, scolded and threatened, they will meekly kiss the hand of

the *Khazyaeen* or the *Khazyaeeke* and beg for forgiveness,—only to appear again half an hour later. If, as often happens, the house is built near a small lake or sheet of water, peasant women and girls will frequently select a corner of the garden as their favourite bathing-place in summer ; and once the custom is established they are as difficult to dislodge as birds that had taken a fancy to building their nests in a letter-box would be. Men and boys would not venture upon such intrusion, for were a servant sent out with a cart-whip, disagreeable results might ensue ; but the fair villagers are fully conscious that, once in possession, their position is absolutely unassailable.

It must be admitted that there is much in the peasant character that is extremely aggravating, and yet there is evidently so sincere a desire not to give offence, such contrition is expressed whenever anything has been done wrong, and withal there is such complete absence of anything resembling impertinence, or even an attempt at self-justification, that it is as difficult to be seriously angry with them as it would be with children. Perhaps to no one is this peculiarity of the Russian peasant character more trying than to the mistress of the house. The number of servants, especially women and girls, often seems out of all proportion to the indoor work required for a family. In the country

districts, women and girls are frequently glad to work, if engaged for the whole year, so as to ensure their maintenance through the winter, for very little more than their food and lodging. Russians are naturally kind-hearted, and, especially in the more remote districts, where old-world ideas have least changed, many are often engaged simply because they are in want and distress and have gone to the *Khaȳaeeke* in their trouble, just as they would have done when serfs. Frequently the kitchens and lower-class servants' quarters seem to be swarming with children. Their mothers were probably engaged, not because they were wanted, but just because they had half a dozen babies to keep. Of course, such peasant servants are not, as a rule, employed in any personal service for the family. Those engaged in this capacity would generally be drawn from a class that is regarded as socially superior, though in reality very little different from the ex-serfs. As might be supposed, with a staff of servants more than half of whom are absolutely untrained, blunders and disasters are of hourly occurrence. Perhaps, tired out with her morning's work, the *Khaȳaeeke* has taken refuge in the drawing-room for half an hour's rest. A faint, timid scratching is heard at the door. A low-class peasant girl would never dare to rap, and the personal servants claim the privilege of coming into any room

they like without asking permission. The unhappy *Khazyaeeha* knows at once that a disaster has happened. A broken-hearted peasant girl comes in, and throwing herself on her knees confesses that she has broken part of the family dinner- or tea-service that she had no right to touch, or that she has done irreparable damage to some other property of her mistress that another, a superior servant, had quite wrongly given her to wash or clean. It is but a small consolation that a Russian servant will almost always come at once and confess any damage she may have done to her mistress's property, for there are moments in life in which ignorance is bliss. If the *Khazyaeeha* bursts into a torrent of wrath and utters dire threats to her trembling handmaiden, she is really to be excused. Apart from the pecuniary loss, the destruction of articles that have to be brought, with all the risk of breakage, over a practically roadless region for, perhaps, fifty or a hundred miles is certainly exasperating. The threatened punishment is rarely inflicted, however, and her own elastic Slavonic nature makes her forget all her griefs half an hour afterwards.

Nor are the superior personal servants less trying to the temper. As they are living in the house, they feel that they are at home, and act accordingly. There is the same ineradicable conviction that a great variety of articles, such as

umbrellas, wraps, etc., are common property and may be used by everyone. There is no disrespect in this, but they feel that they belong to and make part of "the family,"—in a humble capacity, it is true, but they are members all the same, just as the children are. When visitors arrive at the *château*, it is the custom, as soon as the jingling bells of the approaching carriage are heard, for the host and hostess and members of the family to hasten at once to the porch to receive them. The servants, too, are all there. Their welcome is not a whit less cordial and sincere, and so warmly expressed that the visitor will hardly notice the absence of correct reserve that servants would have to adopt in Western Europe.

If the visitor be a Britisher on his first visit to Russia, he will probably find that in these rural districts he has not only entered a new world; he is surrounded by the atmosphere of a more primitive and unconventional age. Perhaps while dressing in the morning he will be startled by one of the servants taking a short cut through his room to save the trouble of going a longer way round. Should he expostulate, he would be graciously informed that it does not matter in the least, and if, in broken Russian, he should express his indignation at being caught in scanty attire, it would only make matters worse. His hands—perhaps his feet—would be kissed in the

vain attempt to assuage his wrath, and the intruder would at length withdraw, penitent, but bewildered, and racking her brains to discover what could have put the *Bareen* out of temper that morning !

Another phase of peasant life is exceedingly curious, and though now essentially characteristic of Russia, it is a survival of a custom which prevailed all over Europe in the Middle Ages. I refer to the wandering *artels* of builders, who are most frequently met with in the Western and North-western governments. Almost every peasant in Russia is a skilful worker in wood. With the use of no other tool than his axe—an instrument with which the *moujick* boasts that he can do anything, from shaving himself to building a house—three or four peasants will construct an *izba*, ready to receive its occupiers, in five or six days. But many buildings, such as mills, churches, and *vodka* breweries, call for technical skill that he does not possess ; and the construction of buildings such as these is often undertaken by wandering *artels* that make a specialty of some particular kind of work. In Western, and more especially in White Russia, most of these *artels* are formed by men of Great Russian race. Nearly all of these are *Raskolniki*, or dissenters from the Orthodox Church, a religious body that represents so important a phase in the national and religious life of the Russian

people that it must be treated separately. There are also many *artels* of Letts from Courland, who make a specialty of the construction of flour-mills. The Letts, who are quite distinct from the Slavonic Russians, are among the most intelligent subjects of the Czar. They are nearly all Protestants, and have hitherto resisted all official attempts to Russianise them. A brief description of the construction of a flour-mill that I happened to witness upon an estate in White Russia will give some idea of how these *artels* work. The Russians are so often regarded as a homogeneous people, that one is apt to forget that even in many parts of Russia, properly so called, there is frequently a very great diversity of race. This was curiously shown in the construction of the mill referred to. The contract was given to an *artel* of Letts, who were just completing some similar work in the neighbourhood, though they only did a part of the work themselves. The digging of the foundations and the simplest part of the undertaking they handed over to an *artel* of ordinary White Russian peasants. The construction of the building they gave to an *artel* of Great Russian *Raskolniki*, and when the building was ready they came themselves for the more difficult work of setting up the machinery. This was entirely of wood, and very intricate, as the mill was a large one, and intended for the grinding of several kinds of flour and meal. Wooden

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machinery is very largely used in the rural districts of Russia, where the motive power is provided by water, wind, or oxen, and requires considerable skill in its construction. Various kinds of wood are used in the same machine,—oak, birch, poplar, fir, or pine, etc., the choice for each part depending upon whether lightness, strength, or a hard polished surface, so as to reduce friction, is required. For instance, the bearings were made of cherry- or apple-wood, as were also the teeth of the cogged wheels. A good deal of thought and care has to be exercised in making up these machines, as the Russian peasantry maintain that two pieces of wood of the same kind must never be brought into contact in those parts of the machine where there is any friction; thus the cherry-wood teeth of one wheel should work upon apple-wood in the other. A very intelligent Lett told me that this is not a mere superstition, but that where the same kind of wood is used the friction, and sometimes the risk of fire from the overheating thus caused, is considerably increased. I give his opinion for what it is worth. In the construction of this mill, the aid of a fourth nationality had to be called in, as the Lettish contractors handed over all the work done in hard-wood, where great accuracy in the carving was needed, to Jewish cabinet-makers. This division of various trades, or even branches of a trade, among members of





LETTISH ITINERANT WORKMAN

*From a photograph by the author*



different nationalities in the same locality, is a peculiar feature in Russian life to be found in many parts of the Empire.

Reserving for another chapter the consideration of the Jews, who play so important a part in Russian life in those portions of the Empire in which they are permitted to reside, there is one other class, more or less nearly connected with them, to whom I must allude before we go beyond the confines of the estate. The trade of the itinerant merchant is still an institution in the rural regions of Russia. Besides the pedlars, who take regular rounds in a relatively small district, there are merchants, mostly Germans, of more or less Jewish origin, who carry on an extensive trade, sometimes extending their operations over several governments. In former times they laid in a large stock of goods at one of the Russian fairs, and then arranged their commercial route in such a direction that, when their stock was sold out, they would be in the vicinity of another fair, where they could lay in a fresh supply. This is still done to some extent, but they now more frequently make some large town their trading centre, and very often are sent out by important firms in Moscow. Their goods are conveyed in vans, just as cheap wares, such as baskets, brooms, and brushes, often are in England. The stock-in-trade of an itinerant Russian merchant, however, is far more valuable.

The few *kopecks* that the purchasing power of the peasants represents, he leaves to his poorer brother, the ordinary pedlar, who toils over hundreds of *versts* with his pack upon his shoulders, while he devotes his efforts to supplying the more aristocratic requirements of the resident landowners, the little nobles, and perhaps even the family of the pope himself, though he would hardly go lower than that in the social scale. His vans are not of very large size, for their transport in that case would be no easy task along the Russian roads, but they always seem to contain the very articles that the wives and daughters of the little nobles have been pining for. Even among their richer neighbours his arrival is a red-letter day to look forward to, and perhaps to remember with anguish and remorse when the moment of excitement is over. The drawing-room is converted into a veritable repository of silks and satins, ribbons and laces. Dress fabrics, that the *Khazyaeeka* would not have looked at in town, appear widely different here with their more simple surroundings. When deftly thrown into graceful folds they become irresistible, above all when the wily *Koupyetx* casually informs her that the Countess A——, her nearest visiting neighbour, has bought twenty *archines* of the same material, not for herself, of course,—it would have been unsuitable for her,—but for her daughter. But for the *Bareenya*,—could anything

be more perfect ? And then when at length he realises that not even his skill can extract more paper *roubles* from his victim's pocketbook for anything he has shown, comes the moment for the *grand coup*. Glancing around, he asks if he can speak with her for a moment alone, at the same time mysteriously withdrawing a large packet that he had hitherto kept concealed. He is in great trouble and danger. His Excellency, her husband, he knows, is a high official at Court. It is certain that he would at once denounce any irregularity, or breach of the law, if it came to his knowledge. A single word to him would be his ruin. But something tells him he can trust the *Bareenya*. He had succeeded in getting a consignment of some of the most beautiful Parisian fabrics ever seen across the frontier, without paying the enormous duty that would have been demanded had they been detected. The greater part he had speedily sold, but this packet—the best of all—he had kept back, knowing, as the *Bareenya* can see for herself, that it would be worth a little fortune at Moscow or St. Petersburg. But alas ! he has just learned that the police are on his track. If this packet should be discovered he is lost ! He will gladly sacrifice it for less than it would cost at the Bon Marché or the Louvre in Paris, merely to get rid of it before the police overhaul his wares. The *Bareenya* need have no scruples. A Grand

Duke may bring into Russia anything he pleases, duty free. Why should she not enjoy the same privilege when such an extraordinary opportunity presents itself? A whispered conference with her daughters follows. Without one dissentient voice it is decided that it would be a sin to lose such-a chance. The precious packet, the contents of which in the excitement have hardly been looked at, is hurriedly hidden away. The *Koupyetx* takes his departure. The empty leather pocketbook, now limp and wrinkled, shows by its creases the void where a packet of rouble notes had been half an hour before. Unless the *Khazyaeeha's* cows can be induced to give double quantities of milk, and the hens each to lay half a dozen eggs a day, months will elapse before that pocketbook will have again acquired the portly thickness that it had that morning!





## CHAPTER IX

### RURAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

**K**EEPING our resident landowner's estate still in view, it will be well to take a wider radius, so as to come into contact with other classes that help to form the material of which the Russian nation is built up. As some of these reside in the nearest country town, a survey of the life they lead will be made clearer by a brief outline of the general system of government. An outline it must necessarily be, for the bureaucratic system is extremely complicated, and is not everywhere identical. The authority of the Czar, as autocratic sovereign, percolates downwards through a complete hierarchy of officials, each responsible directly to the Emperor, or to his own official superior, for his administration. The Empire is divided into governments, of which the most important are designated "General Governments." In the case of the latter, the Governor-General is the representative of the Emperor himself, and he has therefore the supreme control of everything within his vice-

royalty, both civil and military. In each government there is a civil Governor, who is aided by a Council of Regency, and to this council all his administrative acts must be submitted. There are also a Vice-Governor, who can at any moment replace him should he be absent from his post, or unable to perform his official duties, from illness or any other cause ; and a Council of Control, under a special officer responsible directly to the Emperor through the State Control Department. Each government is divided into a certain number of districts, which are, in many respects, replicas, upon a smaller scale, of the government of which they form a part, and they possess a number of administrative institutions of their own. The real administrative power is practically that of the police, and the police commissary, the *Ispravnik*, is consequently supreme. The *Ispravnik's* dominion is yet further divided into smaller sections, of which another police official, the *Stanovoë Pristaff*, is the head. These administrative sections are yet further subdivided into *Volosts*, or cantons, in which, in many rural districts, the police administration is represented by the *Ouriadnik*, a man who in social rank is little, if at all, above an ordinary policeman. Here, in the *Volost*, we meet with the peasant system of self-government, to which allusion has already been made. The head of the *Volost*, so far as the





AN OURIADNIK

MAIN STREET IN SWENTSIANY  
*From a photograph by the author*

A STANOVÖË PRISTAFF



peasants are concerned, is the *Starshina*, or mayor. The *Volost*, which generally corresponds in area with the ecclesiastical parish, is again subdivided into communes, each of which is presided over by a *Starosta*, or sub-mayor, while beneath him are the *Sotnik*, a peasant police official, elected by a hundred households, and finally the *Desiatnik*, elected in the same capacity by ten households. With the *Desiatnik* we have reached the lowest grade of the Russian administrative system. These peasant officials are paid by the community, though only a nominal sum ; and while they are not provided with a uniform, they have metal badges of pewter and bronze to distinguish their respective ranks, and these they wear whenever they are engaged in an official capacity. They generally carry out their duties in a very easy-going way. Some time since a Russian friend of mine was driving along a road in a remote district in which I was then staying, when he observed a single peasant walking in a rather peculiar manner. On approaching nearer he saw that the man was in irons, which were, however, very loosely attached. Soon after, on reaching a roadside *kabak*, he found the village policeman busily engaged with a bottle of *vodka*.

“And where is your prisoner?” inquired my friend. “Are you not afraid he will give you the slip?”

“What?” was the answer, “Stefanovitch give us the slip! Why, he is a neighbour of ours, and we have got to take him to the lock-up, poor fellow! He would never play us such a trick as that; only, he got along so slowly that we were obliged to leave him behind.”

I have myself often seen prisoners, awaiting their trial, working tranquilly in the garden of the *Stanovoë Pristaff*, and gossiping over the low wooden fence with the neighbours, without any supervision. One such prisoner was accused of an offence for which he might have been sentenced to penal servitude. It is true that escape in the rural districts is no easy matter, and, in fact, is very rarely attempted.

As the commune generally represents so small a community, questions which concern it alone are usually settled at a public meeting of the peasants, held under the presidency of their *Starosta*. Should it concern more than one commune, however, it has to be decided at the assembly of the *Volost* to which the communes belong. The group of “ten householders”—the smallest body politic recognised in the Russian government system—elects not only a *Desiatnik*, but also one deputy for the peasants’ council or parliament for the *Volost*. These deputies, called *Vibornie* (or the chosen ones) elect the *Starshina*, or mayor of the *Volost*; the *Starosta*, sub-mayor of the commune; the

peasant judges, who may number from three to twelve according to the size of the community ; and the *Starshina's* secretary. They also elect the peasant official whose duty it is to keep the provision of corn, which the community is obliged to set aside after each harvest for common use in case of need. This man is also very frequently the collector of Government taxes due from the commune as a whole. I have already said, in speaking of the *Starshina's* secretary, that his chief function is that of advising the mayor and the council, so as to avoid difficulties arising with the Government authorities in consequence of any illegal act unintentionally committed by the peasants' council or executive. Should such occur, and should the question involved be too important to be arranged by the local officials, it is referred to a department existing in the administration of each government for the settlement of peasants' affairs, and thence, if need be, to St. Petersburg. As might be expected, disputes and difficulties of all kinds constantly arise in the peasant system of self-government, but only a very small proportion of them is ever sent for settlement to the higher tribunals. A few years ago, a new official, the *Zemski Natchalnik*, was appointed in most of the governments for the purpose of supervising peasant affairs generally in a somewhat paternal manner. His authority replaces

that which the nobles exercised over the serfs until the Emancipation. He possesses considerable disciplinary power, and the creation of this new post has, in some measure, restored the legal authority that the nobles possessed over the peasantry in former times. In the days of serfdom it was exercised personally by the nobles themselves. At the present day the *Zemski Natchalnik* is practically their nominee, as he is selected by the Government administration from a list of candidates recommended exclusively by the nobles in the locality in which he is to serve.

An important extension of the system of self-government, enjoyed by the peasants in the commune and the *Volost*, is presented by the *Zemstva*. These are the elected councils for districts and provinces, and in these assemblies nobles, merchants, the clergy, artisans, and peasants are all represented. The *Zemstva* possess an executive called the *Ouprava*, and are presided over by the Marshal of the Nobles for the district or province. The real power of the *Zemstva* is exceedingly small, but these councils, nevertheless, serve a useful purpose in counteracting, in some degree, the routine and red-tapism of the purely official executive. On the whole, they represent, in an organised and articulate form, something of the more progressive phases of public opinion, which is

not without its influence, even when their views are seemingly disregarded.

In the organisation of the municipalities we find another form of local self-government. In tracing the corporate life of the Russian people upwards from that of the peasants in a small rural commune to the municipal life of a large town, it is exceedingly interesting to note the persistence of the same national tendency whenever a group of Russians, be it large or small, attempts to work for a common object. When, in the earlier days of Russian history, wandering bands of free peasants settled on the land of a noble, they formed a communal association, in which the individual was completely merged in the community, and practically became its slave, while the community itself eventually became the actual property of the landowner. It is this remarkable tendency to absolute self-surrender to a recognised authority that has given a peculiar character to all Russian secret societies, and led their members to render implicit obedience to the orders of their leaders, even when it is evident that they must inevitably entail death or exile. Turning from peasant life to the municipal government of towns, we find the same principle at work. When these towns were founded the burghers associated themselves into groups, and once members of the association, their individuality was gone. The Government,

recognising this national peculiarity, taxed, not the individual trader, but the whole body of which he was but a fraction, having no personal existence in the eyes of the fiscal authorities, exactly as occurred in the case of the peasant communes. Under these circumstances, for a burgher to attempt to quit the town would have thrown the share of taxation he was bound to pay upon the shoulders of his neighbours. The right to quit the urban association was therefore withdrawn. He was *prehriéplen*,—"bound" to the municipality, just as the peasant serf was bound to his commune. If he tried to escape, he was a deserter ; and in 1658 a law was enacted, at the desire of the burghers themselves, by which, should any of their number attempt to escape from his native town, he was liable to the penalty of death. The small traders were divided into a number of categories, each with its own council, or *Douma*, which decided all questions or disputes among the members. Besides these, there was also a superior class of merchants, belonging to a higher social grade, and often possessed of considerable wealth. These men, known as *Ghosti*, or visitors, were generally foreigners, and from their position obtained many privileges quite unknown to the ordinary traders.

The lines upon which civil life was first established in Russia agreed too closely with the national character to be easily eradicated. At the



present day we see everywhere in municipal life evidences of its origin as striking as those which the Russian peasants of to-day have had impressed upon them by the serfdom of former times. Guilds of merchants, the modern representatives of the former associations governed by their *Doumas*, still exist, and are recognised by Government. Thus in 1889, for the whole Empire, 23,000 first-class Guild certificates were issued giving permission to trade on a relatively large scale, while 311,000 Guild certificates were granted to smaller tradesmen. Again, we find a souvenir of the old municipal system, under which a trader could not quit his town, in the modern passport system, by which alone Russians themselves can obtain permission to move, or even to travel, from one part of the Empire to another. In several of the Western governments especially, the passport system is most rigidly enforced. "You want me to believe," said a middle-class Russian to me one day, "that anyone could go from London to Manchester, and even settle there without having his passport examined by the police! Why, the thing is impossible. Suppose he was only trying to escape paying his taxes or his creditors?" It was evident that the man was convinced he had detected yet another of the barefaced attempts, of which Britishers and Americans are so often guilty, of trying to make innocent Russians

believe that in their countries there is a greater degree of individual and personal liberty than in Russia.

By the modern municipal system of government the voters, who must be householders, are divided into three classes. Each of these classes is arranged so as to represent an equal amount of real property, and each elects an equal number of representatives to the *Douma*, or municipal council. This council, in its turn, elects the *Ouprava*, or executive body. In actual fact, however, the power of the municipal government is little more than nominal. It varies in different parts of the Empire, and its privileges were yet further reduced in 1894. In those governments in which Jews are permitted to reside, the bulk of the inhabitants are, as we shall see, generally of that nationality, and special precautions are taken to prevent even the small amount of authority possessed by the municipality from falling into their hands.

From time to time all these various administrations of the "Government" are thrown into a state of intense excitement, when it is announced that the Governor intends to make an official tour through his province. The administration of all the governments of the Empire, and of all the districts into which each government is subdivided, is so completely in the hands of the local bureaucracy that it is a matter of the

utmost importance for each official to prove that within his department, or the district under his charge, everything is in the most flourishing condition. From the Governor downwards the future career of every official depends upon his being able to show that, within his domain at least, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds. It is true that sometimes new brooms sweep clean. A newcomer is not responsible for the mistakes or maladministration of his predecessor. But that predecessor has probably been promoted ; he is possibly the chief of the newcomer, and in any case he has left friends behind him. Thus, the newly appointed official quickly realises that any reform he might suggest, or attempt to introduce, would seem to cast a reproach upon the late administration. It would be resented by his colleagues, and if he wants to avoid friction, and ensure future promotion for himself, he had better let well — or ill — alone. It is therefore to the interest of the entire official body that matters should be so arranged that the Governor's official tour should furnish him with data for a most favourable report to the Minister at St. Petersburg. As for any disagreeable facts, the Governor himself has no desire to see them, so long as they do not reach a point that makes it impossible to ignore them, and it is better for everybody to keep them carefully out of sight. A few years ago,

in a district of Russia that I know well, for some days before the Governor and his suite started upon their official tour of inspection, a little army of peasants was employed all along the roads over which they would have to drive. These roads for over fifty miles were, in their normal condition, little else than tracks of shifting sand. But the patient, steady labour of the *moujicks* was equal to the occasion. In a few days all the irregularities were removed, and for miles harrows were passed over the sand, so as to render it as smooth as a garden path. All traffic was, of course, suspended, and men were stationed to warn travellers to keep off the newly made road.

This was not really a grievance, for I have myself driven many long *versts* through the fields adjoining that same "road," as I found by experience that the fields afforded far easier travelling. The bridges were inspected, and the loose poles, of which they were composed, put into their places, and attached securely enough to hold, at all events for a day or two. In the different *Volosts* the communal schools were visited, and there was a large attendance of pupils, who were, of course, surprised and delighted by the Governor's unexpected visit during lesson time. The district is one in which the bulk of the population does not belong to the Great Russian race, or to the Orthodox Church,

and vigorous efforts have been made for some time past to effect its more complete "Russification." The school children were all clad in the national Russian red vest, and on taking his departure the Governor spoke of the satisfaction it had given him to see the real Russian costume so generally worn among the members of the younger generation. All he had seen, he said, convinced him of the growing prosperity and loyalty of the district, and it would give him great pleasure to mention this in the report that would be sent to headquarters, and also to allude to the intelligence of the pupils, some of whom he had previously interrogated. As a matter of fact, not half the "pupils" had ever been inside that school before, or ever would be again. The costumes they wore had been provided for the occasion, and were sent on immediately to the next *Volost* to be worn by the school children who were to be examined there next day. The children whom the Governor had interrogated had been carefully selected, and none belonged to the ordinary peasant class for whom the school was founded. There was, however, no deception in all this. Quite the reverse ; for it was generally understood that a favourable report was going to be sent in, and so everyone was trying to make the facts accord as near as could be, even if only for an hour or two, with the statements that the report had to contain.

That report would have been altogether false had the Governor seen the district in its normal condition. All that was done, therefore, as the Governor well knew, was done in the interests of truth.





## CHAPTER X

### A COUNTRY TOWN

THE reader who has never visited Russia, or who knows only the capitals and a few of the larger towns, is apt to be led astray by the use of the only words which can be employed in describing Russian life in town and country. I have spoken of "nobles," "farmers," and "peasants," of "burghers" and "artisans," but these words would give an altogether false impression if they were understood as denoting the classes of men so called in the British dominions, or in Western Europe generally. If the real life of the Russian people is less known than that of any other European nation, it is due in no small degree to the fact that in no other country in Europe can an exact counterpart be found for many of the social classes that make up the Russian nation ; and when this fact is not borne in mind the necessary use of the familiar words only serves to give a distorted idea of the Russian classes to which they

are applied. The same warning must be given in reference to the use of the words "town" and "village." There are some "villages" in Russia with a population of twenty or twenty-five thousand souls, while the vast majority of the so-called rural "towns" are really towns only in name, often with a population of only a few hundreds. The streets are generally wide and unpaved, or, at the best, only paved with murderous cobblestones. In many of the larger provincial towns, especially in those districts where wood is abundant, the sidewalks for foot-passengers are often formed of planks, which frequently give way beneath the feet of the pedestrian in a very disagreeable fashion when the loose earth below has been washed away by the rain. Purely Russian towns are, it is true, generally kept in somewhat better order than those of the Jewish districts of the Empire, but even in the former, it is only in the more important that any system of drainage is ever attempted. In the case of the smaller towns, while the drainage is simply allowed to percolate into the soil, it is from wells, sunk often to no great depth in the town itself, that all the water used is obtained. The prevalence of fever and the high rate of mortality under such conditions as these can be readily understood. Indeed, even in the capitals and most of the large towns, while immense sums are



freely spent upon official buildings that convey an impression of imposing magnificence, the all-important questions of drainage and water-supply leave much to be desired. The houses are generally low and irregular, in the smaller towns usually of one or at most two floors. Gaps and open spaces, often in the middle of the town, are frequently left unoccupied, for no apparent reason. The shops are small and dark, but if there is rarely any display of the articles offered for sale, to catch the eye of the passer-by, this is compensated for in a larger measure by the painted sign-boards. These cannot, it is true, lay much claim to artistic merit, but they nevertheless play a useful part. As not more than one peasant in six is able to read,—and the proportion of the illiterate among women is far greater,—the written words *Sapojnik*, *Portnoée*, or *Tchasovstcheek* over the door would convey no more meaning to the great majority of the passers-by than they would to a foreigner unacquainted with the Russian language. The representation of a pair of shoes, a coat, or a colossal watch informs the public in a language that all can read that a shoemaker, a tailor, or a watchmaker is prepared to supply the needs of the community. Except in the more important provincial towns, a bookseller would be sought for in vain, though possibly children's elementary spelling-books might be

found in some general shop stuffed away in a corner.

Should the local town happen to be upon a railway, the station would probably be in striking contrast to all the other buildings. Upon the main lines the accommodation afforded to travellers in Russian railway stations is often at least equal to what would be found even in German stations of the same size and importance. Russian railways, however, were laid down without much regard for the towns, and thus it often happens that the station is situated several miles—sometimes as many as ten or twelve—from the town whose name it bears. In this case a new town frequently springs up around it, but it generally conveys to the visitor the same idea of being merely a temporary makeshift, waiting for something better to turn up, as is given by nearly all the little towns in the rural districts. In these new towns, if the principal street should be paved with cobblestones, the others are usually mere sandy tracks in summer and oceans of mud in spring and autumn. Everywhere there will be the same shanties of wood or brick, doing service for shops or eating-houses for the peasants and set about anyhow, without the least attempt at symmetry or order. All the open space in front of the station will be found thronged with peasants, the wheels of their little four-wheeled waggons, light as they

are, sinking deep into the sand or mud. All that are coming to the station are laden with country produce, and frequently have made a two or three days' journey of sixty or eighty miles. Those that are returning convey manufactured articles and products of all kinds that have been brought by train. The peasants usually travel in groups of from ten to fifty, or even more, the produce they bring to the station having been collected by dealers who contract with the peasants for the transport, the latter, of course, forming themselves into the inevitable *artel*. Their remuneration is exceedingly small, especially in winter, when sledge transport is easy and wages are lowest. At that season, I have myself frequently found peasants who, with their own sledge and pony, were glad to convey a load (about five hundredweight) for sixty miles to the nearest station, and bring back packages of the same weight with them, for three or four roubles, about six or eight shillings. The goods brought back by the peasants are generally for dealers or "middlemen" who supply all the small retail shops, and the little shopkeepers act as their agents in collecting rural produce from the peasantry. In this way a few middlemen united in a ring often control the entire trade of a district.

On market day, the principal inn is, of course, the great centre of attraction for all the better-to-

do classes. It is generally a long, low, irregularly constructed building, brick-built as a rule, the lower part often in the natural colour, while the walls of the upper floors are painted yellow or orange. The principal public room is sure to be crowded on market day with little landowners, dealers, and the chief personages in the town, discussing the news of the day. This room is usually long and low, the walls painted some shade of brown or buff, but discoloured by smoke ; and, in summer, presenting a strangely speckled appearance from the multitude of flies—the plague of Russia—which are crawling or racing over them.

The most important resident in the little town would probably be the *Stanovoë Pristaff*. He would be in uniform,—above all, on market day,—for a Russian official is rarely seen in civil dress; and I will take as a typical specimen of the class one whose acquaintance I made some years ago, under rather amusing circumstances. He was a large, loud-voiced man, whose one dominating idea was that he was the living image of the late Emperor, Alexander III., as represented in the portraits taken of him before his accession to the throne. A remarkable resemblance there certainly was, and this he had increased by cutting his beard in the Dundreary style adopted by the late Emperor when Czarevitch, a fashion which is very rarely followed among the official classes.



MARKET-PLACE IN A RUSSIAN COUNTRY TOWN

*From a photograph by the author*



One day I was taking some snap-shot photographs in a little town in North-western Russia, when this official personage suddenly appeared, and, with a low bow, asked if I would be graciously pleased to take him. To this I at once assented. I was wanting a *Stanovoë Pristaff* for my collection, and he was a fine specimen. The next request was that I should take his portrait in front of his house, a building standing back from the street, in a garden with wooden palings in front. The house itself was a larger edition of the residence of the pope already described. Here he threw himself into a heroic attitude, when, just as I had reached the critical point, he begged me to stop, and approaching once more, inquired if I would be "graciously pleased" to take his wife's portrait also. I naturally replied that I should be delighted. He had hardly reached the gate of his house when a new thought struck him. He returned, and with another bow inquired, "And my sister?" This fourth request granted, he withdrew, but only to return once more. "And my brother?" I assured him it would give me the greatest pleasure in the world to photograph him and every one of his relations; but, unhappily, they would all have to appear upon the same plate, as I had but one at his disposal. Nearly half an hour elapsed before the family party made their appearance. Mrs. *Stanovoë Pristaff* was in a black

silk evening dress that had probably been the height of fashion some twelve years previously ; her sister-in-law wore a walking costume and a bonnet ; while the *Pristaff's* brother, a young officer, appeared in uniform. Little Russian towns have few distractions, and the presence of an Englishman photographing the revered imperial features of the *Stanovoë Pristaff* was an event. A crowd assembled, but was sternly ordered off and lined up against the fence behind. This group, together with the house and garden, made the background ; and the four principal personages stood in a row in front. But, alas ! with the best intentions in the world, things will sometimes go wrong, and when the plate was developed, it appeared that my unhappy *Pristaff*, who was standing too much on one side, had got cut in two. Meeting him upon another occasion, he told me, somewhat ruefully, that he thought perhaps there was enough of him in the half that was taken to show the "remarkable resemblance to the late Emperor with which everyone had been so struck."

Another important person in this little urban community would probably be the *Vratch*, or physician. I have already spoken of his humble *confrère*, the *Feldscher*, in the village commune ; and in introducing the *Vratch*, I will again take a typical example from real life. He was neces-



sarily an educated man, for to obtain his diploma he had had to pass the severe examinations that are now imposed by law. By birth he belonged, not to the nobility, but rather to the social division known as the *Odnodvortsy*. He had served in the Russian campaign at Plevna, where he distinguished himself, and had finally been appointed by the *Zemstvo* to his present position in a little town, the headquarters of a district, with a salary of about £100 a year, but with permission to carry on a private practice as well. His wife was noble, ladylike, and fairly well educated. The house they occupied was one of the best in the town, and was sufficiently typical of the residence of the well-to-do official class in the country to be described. On the ground floor were the dining-room and the doctor's study; on the first floor the drawing-room and one or two bedrooms; with other bedrooms on the floors above. The furniture was of the usual nondescript kind generally met with in Russia,—country-made imitations of the cheaper styles of German or Austrian manufacture. The drawing-room was small, and, as is generally the case in Russian houses of this class, close and stuffy from the mass of *portières* and rugs, which, however essential in winter, make the air doubly oppressive in summer, owing to their being saturated with cigarette smoke. The view from the window was over the central square

and market-place, in the middle of which was the church, and around it small shops, with the post-office, and *Aptéka*, or chemist's shop, at one side. I have already noted the curious fact that various trades in Russia are almost completely monopolised by different nationalities. The *Aptéka* is another example of this. All over the country one constantly finds the chemists' and druggists' shops in the hands of Germans. Most of them are Russian subjects, who have in many cases been established in the Empire for generations; but not the less have they maintained their original nationality, so far as their religion and the use of their own language in their families are concerned. The work of the postmaster in these rural towns is by no means arduous; for, in very many, there are only one or two posts a week. With the population so sparsely spread over so vast an area, it would, of course, be impossible for the letters to be distributed at the residences of the persons to whom they are sent. The more important personages, therefore, give orders for their letters to be kept at the post-office, and call or send for them on post-days. Failing this, they are sent to the headquarters of the commune in which the addressees reside, and remain there till they are asked for. Cut off thus from the outer world, life in the country districts resembles that on board ship in mid-ocean. Patients suffering

from nervous exhaustion are sometimes recommended to try the effect of a voyage to Australia in a sailing ship. They could secure the same complete immunity from the worries and distractions of the outside world by a three months' residence in a rural district in Russia. They need not fear even to be disturbed by telegrams; for in the country districts they can only be sent in the Russian language, and messages from their friends abroad could therefore reach them only after endless delay.





## CHAPTER XI

### JEWISH TOWN LIFE

WE have already seen how small a proportion of the inhabitants of Russia can be classed as belonging to the urban districts. Less than 12 per cent. reside more or less permanently in towns, and not 20 per cent. near enough to towns and townlets to be affected by urban life. This proportion, small as it is, would be considerably reduced if we regarded only the population of purely Russian race. Nearly all the foreigners living in Russia — Germans, Austrians, Belgians, French, Greeks, Armenians, etc. — settle in or near the towns. Besides these, there are over three and a half millions of Jews in Russia, exclusive of Poland, and of these the great majority reside in towns of greater or less importance, thus considerably reducing the proportion of the purely Russian element of the urban population. The Jews form fully one-fourth of the total town population of the Empire in Europe ; and, counting the

other foreign elements, it is estimated that over one-third of the urban population of Russia consists of foreigners whose life has little or nothing in common with that of the Russians properly so called. The relative importance of this non-Russian element in town life is increased yet more by the fact that, except where the Jews reside, nearly all the foreign settlers occupy the superior positions of merchants, dealers, manufacturers, employés, or skilled artisans, while the unskilled workmen are of Russian race. It is evident, therefore, that purely Russian life in towns is that of but a very small fraction of the Russian people. The Jews, however, play so large a part in the economic condition of the Empire that a brief description must be given of the life they lead. They reside almost exclusively within what is known as the "Jewish Pale of Settlement," consisting of nearly the whole of Western Russia, from the frontier of Courland in the north to the Crimea. Within this immense area, nearly a thousand miles in length and three hundred miles wide, comprising fifteen governments, the Jews form over 80 per cent. of the population of four towns, between 70 and 80 per cent. in fourteen, from 50 to 70 percent. in sixty-eight towns, and between 20 and 50 per cent. in twenty-eight.

So much has been written about the Russian antipathy to the Jews, that I will not dwell upon

that aspect of the question, although it is one that forces itself upon our attention wherever Jewish and Russian populations come into contact. Perhaps the picture I have given of the various phases of character of the two classes that make up the great bulk of the Russian people may serve to explain to some extent the cause of this antipathy. In almost every feature of their moral nature, the Jew and the Russian, both noble and peasant, are diametrically opposed to one another. In one phase alone of their character have they anything in common : both the Jews and the lower class of Russians have the deepest attachment to their respective religious faiths, for which they would submit to any sacrifice. The unfortunate relations of Jews and Christians are not due, however, to religious differences alone, or to their complete divergence of character. The social condition of the Russian people is, as we have seen, altogether peculiar. The mere fact that the majority of the inhabitants of the towns in so large a portion of the Empire are absolutely different in race, religion, and language from the inhabitants of the rural districts around them alone suffices to create a new and very difficult feature in the economic situation. It is rendered yet more complicated by the additional fact that this alien urban population is as remarkable for its marvelous business faculty as the higher class of

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A COUNTRY TOWN "WITHIN THE PALE." JEWISH YOUTHS AND CHILDREN IN THEIR SABBATH DRESS  
*From a photograph by the author*





Russians, and especially landed proprietors generally, are for their complete lack of that quality. This advantage has given to the alien race, which controls so large a part of urban life, the almost complete monopoly of the trade and commerce of Russia within the Jewish pale. The condition of things thus brought about has created an immense difficulty for Russia, and one which it would tax the ingenuity of even the wisest statesmanship to solve.

Elsewhere in Europe, where the inhabitants of the towns and the rural districts are identical in race, language, and religion, the influence of the country towns plays no small part in developing the civilisation of the peasantry. Even the weekly visit to the town on market day, and contact with the tradesmen, whose intellectual existence is on a higher plane than their own, unconsciously aid in raising the *morale* of the country people. Throughout the whole of the Jewish pale, over an area of nearly three hundred thousand square miles, this influence is entirely wanting, and there is nothing to take its place. Between the inhabitants of town and country—Jewish traders on the one hand, and Russian peasants on the other — there is a great gulf fixed, which keeps them morally as far apart as if they dwelt on different planets. Of course, all this in no way excuses the system of persecution to which the Russian Jews have so often been subjected, but

it explains how it is that their presence in Russia has given rise to difficulties for which no parallel can be found in Western countries. A visit to a rural town in the Russian Jewish pale gives us quite a new insight into the conditions of rural life. Most of these towns are very small, many with less than five or six thousand inhabitants. The houses, like those in the Christian towns, are low, built generally of brick, though sometimes partly of timber, but always far more slightly than the *izbas* of the peasantry. Though there is considerable variety in their architecture, there is one feature that they almost all possess in common,—the extreme of squalid dilapidation. The sanitary condition is, if possible, worse than in the very poorest of the Russian country towns. Household refuse of every kind is simply thrown into the streets. The liquid portion slowly percolates downwards, while the solid *débris* stamped into the sand, forms a crust in dry weather, and a swamp that is simply indescribable after a few hours' rain. The large open space that serves for the market-place is reserved for the peasants, who bring their produce here on market day. The most striking feature in the town is, of course, the church ; and this is often an imposing building, quite out of proportion to its surroundings or to the real requirements of the small Christian population in the vicinity. The synagogue is generally

hidden away, though it may not be built nearer than six hundred yards to the orthodox church. Many a small Jewish townlet, however, has no synagogue, as permission to erect one is granted only when the Jewish population exceeds eight hundred, and a house of prayer in its place can only be opened when the Israelitish community exceeds five hundred.

For five days in the week the visitor would suppose that the inhabitants of the town consisted mainly of dogs, grey-backed crows, and pigs ; for while the Russian Jews observe all the ordinances of their religion far too rigorously to touch pork, they are not insensible to the pecuniary value of the living pig. On the Jewish Sabbath the streets are thronged with the human inhabitants standing in groups discussing their affairs. On market day the population is more than doubled by the peasantry, who pour in from all the country round, bringing their farm products or home-made wares for sale. The *débris* left when the market is over, added to the garbage thrown daily into the streets, forms no small part of the pigs' daily fare. Their battles with the dogs, that seem to belong to nobody in particular, are almost incessant. The grey-backed crows take life more philosophically. As tame as pigeons, they go about as if the whole place belonged to them, and whenever a quarrel arises between dogs and

pigs, are always ready to intervene and snap up the savoury morsel that led to the dispute.

The typical costume of the Jews is now not often seen in Russia, except in towns near Poland, and in a few districts in the south and west. The dress of the older generation has, it is true, a distinctly Jewish cut, but the younger men are generally clad in what might be the worn-out habiliments of a city clerk. The Russian Jew, indeed, never looks like a workman, although a very large proportion are artisans engaged in many different handicrafts. All, except the richer traders, appear like men who had once upon a time belonged to a higher class, but had been brought down to the very lowest depths of degradation and poverty. Even in winter Jewish artisans and small traders may be seen shuffling along the ill-paved streets, clutching the flaps of their flimsy, ragged, buttonless black overcoats with nervous, trembling hands across their breasts. In the coldest of weather they will never adopt the clothing of the Russian peasants, which would cost them no more than their own garments. To the last, the Jew clings to his black coat as a badge of vanished respectability. But though secretly disdaining the life of a workman, no race in Europe perhaps works so incessantly. The trades taken up by them do not, it is true, call for much physical strength. Throughout the whole of the Jewish

pale, shoemaking, tailoring, cabinet-making, and the glaziers' and painters' trades are almost exclusively in their hands. Strange to say, this passion for industry does not apply to the women in the small rural towns, though in the larger, such as Vilna and others, they are often hard-working. Like the men, they avoid wearing garments made of the rough and solid materials worn by the peasantry. Their dresses, generally of some flimsy fabric, cut in a fashion to imitate those worn by a richer class, but ragged, bedraggled in the mud, and often hardly holding together, give them an even more disreputable appearance than that of the men ; and this is rather increased than diminished by the fact that the younger women and girls very frequently possess the type of beauty for which Jewesses are celebrated. Rarely, if ever, have I seen the women or girls working with the men in small towns, even in such trades as tailoring or shoemaking. House-work, in a dwelling of one or two rooms, in which the entire furniture consists of a table and a few benches, is not a very arduous task, and their chief occupation seems to be lolling at the doors, or gossiping with the men at their work. Most of the Jews are able to read and write both in Yiddish and Russian ; but except among the richer trading classes, the Jewesses are almost totally illiterate. They are generally married at fourteen

or fifteen, but a dowry is indispensable and not always obtainable. Divorce is extremely easy and very frequent, especially when the dowry is so small that it can be easily repaid. It is from the Jewesses that the immoral classes in the large towns are mainly recruited. This may be caused by the stress of poverty ; but in this respect they compare unfavourably with the Russian peasant women, a large proportion of whom are equally poor. Immorality among the latter is, it is true, common enough, but there is rarely anything sordid in connexion with it. Unfortunately the lower class of Russian Jews do not seem to regard such conduct as at all disgraceful, and they are not ashamed of admitting it, even when members of their own families are affected. The reason may, in part, be found in the Oriental contempt that all Russian Jews feel for women, and which, of course, exists most strongly among the lower orders. Among the working classes in the country, the women and girls in a Jewish family would never be allowed to take their meals at the same table or at the same time as the men.

In another important particular the Jews differ entirely from their Russian neighbours. The peasants often seem quite unable to work unless they associate themselves in *artels*. The Jews, on the contrary, have a positive dislike for co-operative associations. "That would never do

for us," said a Jewish cabinet-maker to me one day. "I want to make money, and I work as many hours a day as I can stand. If we had an *artel*, the others might work less than I do and yet their share would be just the same." At ten or eleven years of age, a Jewish artisan commences his apprenticeship, which sometimes lasts for thirteen or fourteen years. I have frequently met Jewish apprentices over twenty-three years of age. This is due to their often taking up two or more trades in succession, a custom very generally adopted by those who intend to emigrate to the British dominions or to America. They generally select trades that are more or less related ; thus, the cabinet-maker mentioned above had also served his apprenticeship to a painter and glazier and to a locksmith. There is no doubt that this system, aided by their skill, intelligence, and unflagging industry, gives the Jews an immense advantage when competing as emigrants with the workers of other races. If the demand for labour in any particular trade is slack, the Jewish artisan can at once turn to another, and is thus almost certain to secure employment. As soon as his own apprenticeship is over, an artisan will take as many apprentices in his turn as he believes he can profitably employ. This is done even by those who have no regular workshop of their own in town, but depend upon the occupation

they can find in the neighbourhood, or on the property of landowners in the vicinity. They almost always arrange to be paid by contract, and not by time. The apprentices for the first few years receive no wages, but only board and lodging, yet the work exacted from them is terribly severe. On more than one occasion I had to interfere to prevent Jews, who had undertaken work on contract upon an estate that was for some time under my control, from compelling boys under twelve to work almost incessantly from five o'clock in the morning until after ten at night. The skill of the Jewish artisan is truly remarkable, if we consider that he is absolutely deprived of all the means that are generally regarded as essential for the technical acquirement of any industry. For him there are no museums or libraries, no evening continuation classes or technical schools. For the vast majority there are no schools of any kind that they can attend. Whatever scraps of knowledge they may possess, they have picked up at home, or learned as apprentices from their masters, who themselves learned all they knew of their trade in the same way. Yet I have often been surprised at their dexterity, and, above all, their ingenuity, in doing work which was perfectly new to them.

Though the Jews are not beloved in Russia, the richer inhabitants of the rural districts



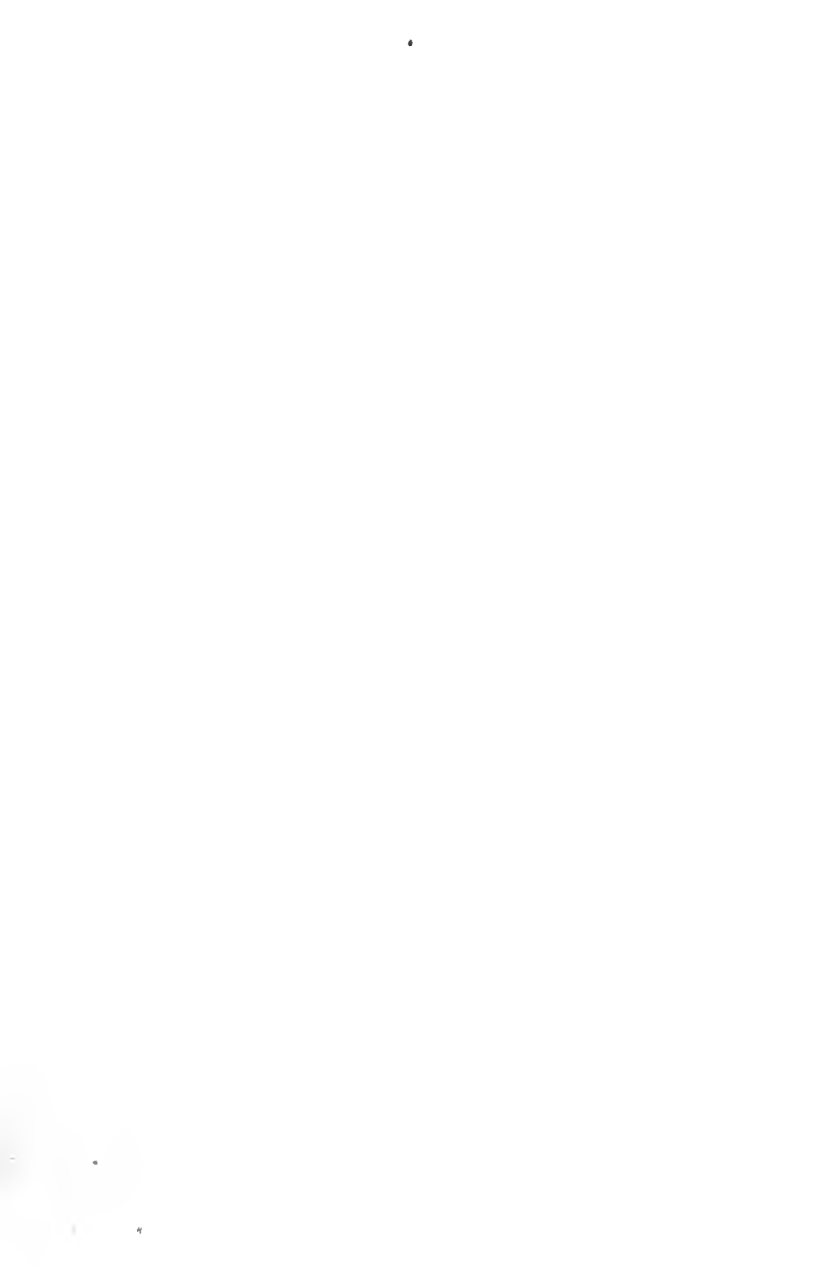
within the pale would be sadly embarrassed were they all to take their departure. The regulations relating to the Jews are by no means generally understood abroad. This, however, is not surprising, since they can hardly be said to be understood in Russia itself, in consequence of the system by which new regulations and edicts are frequently issued by the Government without revoking others—sometimes of quite a contradictory nature—already in force. The result is that the new edict is often found to be altogether unworkable, but instead of being recalled, it is allowed to remain while yet another is added. The consequence of this is that the local administrations, while carrying out the intentions of the Government in their general principles, do not really execute the actual letter of the law. Thus, in strict law, Jews were prohibited from settling outside the urban districts within the Jewish pale, with the sole exception of members of Jewish colonies which had long been established as agriculturists. As I was residing in a Jewish district of Russia during a part of the period in which the expulsion of Russian Jews excited so much strong feeling abroad, I had ample opportunities of seeing how the system worked. To have carried out the law would have been a physical impossibility. A wholesale expulsion of the Jews upon such a scale as to produce any appreciable effect upon their

numbers, or coercive action which would have led to so large a number emigrating from Russia, would have raised an outcry in Europe and political complications that no Russian statesman would have dared to face. ( Besides this, the complete dislocation of country life that would have resulted from it would have been as injurious to the Russian inhabitants as to the Jews. A vast number of trades, such as shoe-making, tailoring, painting, glazing, cabinet-making, and many more, absolutely essential to the daily existence of the people, are mainly in the hands of Jewish artisans. ) The local officials, therefore, generally acted as though the law demanded the expulsion from the country districts of those Jews whose residence there was the least desirable ; as for the others, their existence was simply ignored. Undoubtedly there was often great hardship and injustice in this rough-and-ready mode of compromising the matter, but in many cases the rapid increase in the Jewish population had so greatly exceeded the means of obtaining profitable employment, that the Jews who remained found their position considerably improved. Instances came to my own knowledge in which Jewish artisans were denounced to the police by other Jews, with the object of getting rid of competitors in their trade. One such case occurred upon the estate upon which I was then living. A young Jewish



"BOOTH" OF RUSSIAN JEWS "LIVING IN TABERNACLES"

*From a photograph by the author*



tailor had settled upon the property, when the recognised tailor of the locality, who, basing his claim upon one of the old edicts, had been there long enough to claim a permanent legal residence, communicated with the police authorities and demanded his expulsion. The newcomer was arrested, but three weeks later was back again and was living upon terms of the most affectionate friendship with his rival. As the latter was over seventy years of age, and a tailor was badly needed, the police had turned a deaf ear to his appeals. The matter had been compromised by the young tailor marrying the old man's granddaughter, and going into partnership with him.





## CHAPTER XII

### THE JEWISH TRADER

BESIDES the Jewish artisans and retail dealers, there are in almost all the rural towns within the pale, Jews of a far more important financial position. Many are also to be found in purely country districts where, in strict law, their presence is illegal. When, some years ago, the enforcement of the edicts relating to the residence of the Jews led to the emigration of thousands of their poorer co-religionists, the wealthier Jews were very rarely disturbed. Even when, as a mere formality, they were "expelled" from the country districts, they generally returned a few weeks later, when the storm had blown over, and thereafter remained unmolested. Many of these financial Jews are large capitalists, and are chiefly engaged in trading and money-lending operations. As money-lenders, their business has been considerably curtailed of late years through the competition of the Land Banks, supported by the Government, from which loans,

at a low rate of interest, can be obtained for large or small amounts. The Government aid thus given, however, does not compete with one branch of the money-lending business which recent investigations before a British Parliamentary Committee prove to have been somewhat unpleasantly developed in England by Jewish immigrants from Russia. Compromising documents are sometimes a more valuable security for the repayment of a loan than even landed property, a fact that was lately revealed in a very striking manner in a Russian Government inquiry.

No European race, perhaps, is so liable as the Russian to fall victims to the unscrupulous money-lender. Good-natured, easy-going, absolutely thoughtless of the morrow, if only the disagreeable pressure of the moment can be got rid of anyhow, most of the official classes have also a very real difficulty to face. The number of officials for the administration of so vast an Empire is necessarily enormous, and their legitimate emoluments proportionately small. Even with the strictest economy, a Russian official can rarely live upon his pay alone. Unhappily, the life that strict economy entails would generally be fatal to any chance of promotion. Cards and gambling are the chief distractions of society, and refusal to play would often be as ruinous to an official's success and hopes of promotion as

administrative incapacity would be. A young officer, shortly before the assassination of the Emperor Alexander II., after playing somewhat recklessly late one night at the residence of the Governor of one of the Western Provinces, discovered next day that, without an immediate advance of a large sum, he would be disgraced and ruined. Popular in society, possessed of real ability, and with many relations in high official circles, the success of his future career had seemed certain, but nevertheless, for the moment, his signature was the only security he could give for the loan. For the accommodating usurer to whom he applied this sufficed, if he gave, with his promise to repay, certain letters in his own handwriting, and in terms that were dictated to him, indicating—though of course altogether falsely—that he was in communication with Nihilists, who were then abroad and beyond the reach of the Russian police. These documents were “merely a guarantee.” They were to be placed in an envelope, to be sealed and deposited in the money-lender’s safe, there to remain with the seal unbroken until the debt, principal and interest, was repaid, when they were immediately to be restored to the writer. On no other terms could the money be obtained, and the young noble, to escape imminent disgrace, accepted. It is needless to say that the documents



were never returned. In a few days they were in safe-keeping beyond the frontier ; and from that moment the victim was practically the slave of his creditor. The pressure put upon him was, however, most carefully regulated. Nothing was done that would interfere with his promotion, for with each step upwards, his annual "fleeing" afforded richer and richer results to his tormentor, while other "compromising documents" were wrung from him at critical moments in his career, to prevent any weakening, through the lapse of time, of the hold that had already been secured upon him. The climax was reached some fifteen years later, when occupying a post of great responsibility, a demand was made upon him that he was absolutely unable to meet. A statement sent by himself to the head of his department, followed immediately by his death by his own hand, revealed the condition of slavery in which he had been living for years. The secret inquiry that followed proved that his story was perfectly true, but the black-mailer, warned of his danger, was already safe with his friends abroad. The Government discovered, however, that this was by no means an exceptional case, and that a vast number of officials, many holding posts of the greatest responsibility, were absolutely at the mercy of money-lenders, mostly of Jewish race. The greatest ingenuity had been exercised to secure a hold

upon their victims, and in not a few cases the latter had actually been compelled to commit real irregularities—which, if made known, would have entailed their official and social ruin—and forced to deposit proofs of their misconduct with them. As some remedy for this state of things, a small but still quite inadequate increase was at once made in the pay of a large class of officials. At the same time, it was made known that the Czar regarded gambling among the official classes with extreme disfavour. It would need, however, far more drastic measures than the mere expression of a wish, even from the Emperor himself, to eradicate so deeply rooted an evil.

The money-lending fraternity fortunately form the minority of the richer class of Russian Jews. By far the greater number are engaged in trade and commerce, and play a highly important part in the national life. [The anti-Semitic Russians—and this means practically the entire nation—maintain that, could the Jews be got rid of, Russian traders would take their place. It may be doubted, however, whether they would do so to the extent supposed, for in many parts of the Empire where Jews are not permitted to reside an increasing proportion of the internal trade of the country is falling into the hands of foreigners, among whom the most influential are of German, and, more recently, of Belgian and French origin, while in other localities Greeks

and Armenians are steadily gaining ground.) As a typical example of the life of the Russian Jewish trading classes in the country and in the small towns, I may take that of a Jewish family of whose affairs I happen to have some knowledge. Throughout the whole of the Jewish pale, in nearly every district, the trade of the country is carried on upon very similar conditions.

[In the district to which I refer, the only wholesale dealers in all the necessaries of life, from drapery and clothing to agricultural implements, tools, and groceries, are members of the same Jewish family. So, too, are the sole purchasers of agricultural produce of all kinds, and the only timber merchant in the locality, who, by the contracts he has made and partly paid for in advance, has secured the right to cut all the timber available in the forests of all the landowners in the vicinity for many years to come. All the village shops and inns, without exception, are kept by Jews appointed by members of the same family, and exclusively supplied by them with goods from their own wholesale stores. All the *vodka* breweries are in their hands, and so, too, are the flour-mills and a large number of farms, though the presence in this region of the new Jewish settlers, by whom they are occupied, is illegal. The family "ring" is, however, far too powerful, and has too strong a hold upon the local officials, to fear any interference from them.

Throughout the whole district, it would be impossible to buy a single article, from a needle to a plough, without applying to some member of this family syndicate, or their nominees in the village shops. An intending purchaser would have to take a journey of at least twenty miles if he wished to avoid dealing with them ; and even then he would be no gainer, as he would merely have entered another district, the trade of which is controlled in precisely the same way by another financial group. Long credit is the rule in Russia : but this can be safely given, as members of the " ring " are the only purchasers of the produce of the land, and the corn, butter, cheese, or timber sold by a landowner or farmer to any member of the family is held as a guarantee for the payment of any goods that may previously have been supplied to the agriculturist by some other member of the " ring."

It is easy to realise the consequences of this complete monopoly of the rural trade in the hands of a relatively small number of shrewd business men throughout almost the whole of the Jewish pale. [Its injurious effects upon Russia are greatly increased by the fact that most of these Jewish traders are the representatives of influential commercial associations in Germany, formed by manufacturers of goods exported to Russia, and wholesale dealers in Russian rural produce.] Competition is thus rendered almost

impossible ; and the prices paid to the agriculturist for his produce, as well as those he is compelled to pay for all the manufactured articles that he needs, are really fixed by the powerful association of foreign manufacturers and dealers. Indeed, throughout the rural districts of the Jewish pale, articles of Russian manufacture can hardly ever be obtained. The pressure that these foreign "rings" are able to bring to bear upon Russian officials is far greater than might be supposed. It is a matter of personal importance to each official that everything in his district should go upon oiled wheels, and, above all, that the revenue and taxes should not fall off.

[It is only necessary for the "rings" in any particular district to instruct their agents to refrain from buying any rural produce for a few months, to produce a state of things in which almost any concession would be granted to them.]

I have entered into some detail in describing this phase of Russian life, as it explains the antipathy generally felt by the Russians towards both the Germans and German-speaking Jews. By the lower orders, the two races are regarded as almost identical, and *Ioudiék* and *Niémiétk* (Jew and German) are two of the most insulting expressions that the peasants can use in their disputes among themselves. Not long ago, a peasant in a district in which I was then living was tried for having stabbed and otherwise damaged

a neighbour with whom he had been quarrelling. He proved that the man had called him a "German" (*Niémietz*), and he was at once acquitted, as the magistrate admitted that "the provocation was unendurable."

The family life led by the richer Jews in the country would give no idea of their real financial position. The family I have been describing could certainly command a capital exceeding £30,000,—a very considerable sum in the rural districts of Russia. The house of the timber merchant I alluded to was, nevertheless, a poor cottage of one floor, consisting of five or six rooms with whitewashed walls, and very scantily furnished. Notwithstanding this, his only daughter was a well-educated and ladylike girl. She had, however, been brought up abroad, and her father intended her to marry one of her coreligionists in Germany. Her "country cousins," who lived with their parents and grandmother at a village bazaar, were less fortunate. Though their family was quite as well off, they worked and dressed like the daughters of the poor artisans, and were quite uneducated. The position of their only brother, a boy of fourteen, was, however, widely different. It is by no means easy in Russia for a Jew to be educated in any of the higher-class schools, as Jews must in no case form more than 10 per cent. of the total number of pupils. Very many of the richer

Jews are therefore educated at home, and this custom was adopted in the case of the young "heir" to the village bazaar. He was provided with a resident private tutor — naturally a Jew — and, always dressed in a costume of the latest Berlin fashion of shining black cloth, he would lounge at the door with his hands in his pockets, smoking a cigarette, while his barefooted sisters on a Friday afternoon, an hour or two before the Sabbath began, were bringing pails of water to wash the pavement outside the shop.

The life of the richer Jews in the large towns such as Vilna is, of course, very different, and at certain times they are by no means averse to making an ostentatious display of their wealth. On the occasion of a marriage, for instance, a curious procession of men, all dressed in new suits of black, is frequently to be seen marching in a body of forty or more from the bride's home to her new house, carrying in their hands the various pieces of furniture that form part of her dowry. Each article is carried separately, and held up for the inspection of the crowd on each side of the street, who eagerly criticise its appearance and estimate its probable value. Half a dozen men will toil along with a grand piano, and behind them will come another holding up a pair of lamps or vases, and then a dozen more, each carrying a chair. In this way, notwithstanding the number of men engaged,

several hours often elapse before the whole has been transported through the town.

While there is much in the character of the artisan Jews that one cannot help admiring,—their devotion to their religion and their untiring industry and perseverance in the face of restrictions that would have crushed an ordinary race,—it is difficult to entertain the same feeling for the wealthier class of Jews in Russia. The rigorous Government of the Empire is not the only authority which the poor Russian Jew must implicitly obey. There is another, controlled almost exclusively by the financial classes of his own people, which he dare not dream of resisting. The power of the *Kahal*,—the court of the congregation,—though it has no legal force to support it, is for him more potent and far reaching than that of the Czar himself. It has the right to control every act of his existence, both civil and religious. If he desires to follow his calling in any particular locality the *Kahal* may forbid it, if it would be injurious to the interests of another Jew. If a small Jew trader gave credit to a Christian upon easier terms than his neighbours, or sold any of his wares below the price fixed by the “ring” controlling the trade of the district, the *Kahal* might inflict the severest punishment. I have known several cases in which Jewish artisans, who had accepted contracts for work upon terms that they learned





JEWISH ARTISAN (A GLAZIER) AND A "COMMERCIAL" JEW

*From a photograph by the author*



afterwards had been refused by other Jews, have returned and begged to be released from their engagement at any sacrifice. They dared not attempt to conceal the terms of the contract, for the *Kahal* is a religious organisation, and might have called upon them to state the conditions on oath. The least infraction of any ordinances of the law, such as the carrying of any object in the hand on the Sabbath, if seen by two Jewish witnesses who could swear to the act, would place the offender entirely in their power, as it would enable them to denounce him to the *Kahal*. The *Kahal* may interfere in the most private matters of family life. It may order a man to divorce his wife, or to marry the daughter of his bitterest enemy ; and his choice would lie between obedience and what, to the majority of the Jews, would be worse than death, the renunciation of his faith and expulsion from the synagogue.

Working-class Jews, who would speak to me as an Englishman without reserve, have often expressed their opinion of their wealthier co-religionists in a way that they would have refrained from doing to a Russian. As it is by the richer classes that the rabbis and talmudists are chiefly supported, the *Kahal* is practically in their hands. A poor Jew who has fallen into the clutches of one of his richer brethren is, in fact, far worse off in Russia than a Christian

would be. The latter might always count upon a certain amount of protection from the official classes, while the poor Jew would have none, except in the event of his turning Christian. In this case he would at once be absolutely safe, as by law no Jew can appear as a witness against another who has entered the Orthodox Church. The moment he became a Christian he would have permission to settle wherever he pleased in Russia ; he would receive a gratuity in money from the Government to make a new start in life ; he would be granted the right to divorce his wife and marry again, while the discarded wife would have but a poor chance of recovering any portion of her dowry. The inducements to embrace Christianity offered by the Russian Government certainly appeal to the least estimable features in the Jewish character ; and it is to the credit of the Jews that not more than about a thousand annually are tempted to abjure their faith. Perhaps the Orthodox Church is hardly to be congratulated upon the relatively small number who do enter its portals. Until quite recently, a converted Jew had the right to claim the rank of a noble, and assume a name that would conceal his Semitic origin. To this day, any person who converts a certain number of Jews to the Orthodox faith is entitled by law to an order of knighthood. Only one case of conversion came to my own knowledge, that of

a young girl who turned Christian in order to marry a Russian peasant. A friend of mine somewhat thoughtlessly asked her parents some months later if she was happy in her new home. The reply was given in a tone of sadness that evidently meant even more than the words expressed, "She is dead to us!" I should add that the Jews in the vicinity had been warned that they would all be expelled if she were in any way molested.





## CHAPTER XIII

### THE "ODNODVORTSY "

THROUGHOUT the greater part of Russia, but especially in the central governments, members of a highly important class are to be found, who, though numbering nearly two millions, are not, like the nobles, the peasants, or the burghers, organised in any officially recognised social group. This class is known as the *Odnodvortsy*,—literally "men of one estate," *i.e.*, possessors of a house and a farm which they cultivate themselves. They correspond to a certain extent with the yeomen freeholders who were formerly so numerous in England, but a large proportion of them are men of far inferior rank, and but little better off than the peasantry.

Notwithstanding their present position, most of the *Odnodvortsy* are descendants of noble families which had for generations been upon the downward grade. Movement in this direction has always been easy among the landowning classes, and it is rendered more rapid by the

Russian custom of dividing the family estate equally among all the sons, a provision of one-fourteenth having previously been made for each of the daughters.

It is from the *Odnodvortsy* that the lower class of civil and military officials and the small traders, dealers, and manufacturers of Russian race in the towns are mainly derived. The houses of the more prosperous among them are generally very similar to that of the pope already described, and when the family is really noble, some attempt is often made to keep up appearances. The children receive as good an education as the family means permit, and the sons generally endeavour to obtain some unimportant Government post. Unless, however, the descent to their present condition has been very recent, the mere fact of their being "nobles" would avail them nothing in their intercourse with their richer neighbours.

The term "noble," indeed, signifies even less in Russia than in most continental countries, though there are nobles in Russia whose descent is fully as illustrious as that of almost any noble family in Europe. Some of these are *Kniazes* (princes), but many, though of princely origin, bear no title at all. There are in Russia sixty families of *Kniazes*, descended from sovereign princes who reigned in Russia in former ages. The title of *Kniaz* is, indeed, the only really

Russian one that exists ; the others, such as count or baron, being merely relatively modern innovations imported from Western Europe. Even the title of *Kniaz* would not in itself secure any social distinction for its bearer. Some years ago a Russian lady friend of mine was about to engage a maid whose references were altogether unobjectionable ; but, in accordance with Russian law, she was told that she must first hand over her passport to her future mistress. This the girl endeavoured to avoid, but as she could not possibly secure the place otherwise, she at length reluctantly consented, and declared, with tears, that now she knew she would never be engaged. The passport, as an official document, gave her the title that was her legal due,—that of a princess ! Like many others, her family had sunk through successive generations, until it had reached the rank of the *Odnodvortsy*.

In proof of the relatively small value of hereditary titles, apart from a purely official position, I may mention an instance that came to my own personal knowledge. The youngest son of a family that was really of princely origin, but possessed no title, was registered at his birth as *Kniaz*, by a mistake of a country official. Upon the birth register are based all the other official documents, the passport, etc., required in after life. Through the blunder of an ignorant clerk, he was therefore provided with a title that,



being "officially" recognised in subsequent documents, became practically valid, since it would have given more trouble than it was worth to deprive him of it.

When hereditary titles of the highest class are thus lightly regarded, it is by no means surprising that persons should often be met with belonging really to the peasant class, but nevertheless technically noble. Some years ago, when visiting at a Russian country house, a very poorly clad peasant woman appeared before the drawing-room balcony on the lawn, where peasants were in the habit of assembling to make their petitions. On being observed by my hostess, she threw herself upon her knees, and beating her forehead upon the ground began a vehement and incoherent appeal for aid. It turned out at last that she was asking permission to obtain wood from the forest to mend the roof of her *izba*,—a gift of the value of a couple of shillings. The woman was "noble," and so, too, was her husband, the village blacksmith. Notwithstanding her abject appeal, she would certainly have refused to take a meal in the dining-room reserved for the peasants from the village. This little incident, however, occurred in White Russia, where even those peasants who have always been free have never been able to recover from the moral effects of the heavy yoke imposed upon them when that portion of the present

Russian Empire formed a part of the ancient kingdom of Poland. The *Odnodvortsy* of the central governments belong to the Great Russian race, a nationality that has always been, both physically and morally, far superior to either their White Russian or Little Russian neighbours.

An incident that occurred when I was in St. Petersburg in 1895 illustrates in a very striking way the character and type of men frequently to be found among the more prosperous members of the *Odnodvortsy* in Great Russia. Among the Russian orders of knighthood, one of the most highly esteemed is that of the Knights of St. George. This decoration, like the British Victoria Cross, is bestowed only for some signal act of courage upon the battle-field, and, in the assembly of the members upon St. George's Day in St. Petersburg, generals, and even grand dukes, who may only have received a cross of the lowest grade, will frequently find themselves in contact with officers of far inferior rank who, notwithstanding, belong to one of the highest classes of the order. These assemblies are generally attended by the Emperor, the sovereign passing through the hall, and spending an hour or two in conversing informally with the members. On the first of these receptions held by the present Emperor, an officer of low rank in the army, but the fortunate possessor of a St. George's Cross, was presented to him. This

officer was a splendid type of the *Odnodvortsy* class, sadly lacking, it is true, in many of the most essential qualities of a courtier, but of magnificent physique, and as cool and self-possessed in that courtly throng of grand dukes and princes as he had been before the fire of the enemy. The Emperor was evidently struck by his appearance, and after a few moments' conversation respecting his military career, he inquired :

"And what is your present position?"

"Under the surveillance of the secret police, your Majesty," was the amazing reply.

"The secret police!" exclaimed the Emperor.

"But why? What are you accused of?"

"That is precisely what I am anxious to discover, your Majesty," replied the officer. "All that I know is that I was unlucky enough to offend the Governor of the province where I live, and he has kept me in this horrible position for years. He knows I have committed no offence against the law, and so has never had any inquiry made."

"But why did you not send a petition to me? and the whole matter would have been investigated."

"I did so, your Majesty."

"I am perfectly certain that no petition bearing your name has ever reached me," replied the Emperor.

"That can be very easily explained. Why, I should not even have had permission to quit my farm to come to St. Petersburg, had it not been for the order to attend here as a Knight of St. George. Do you imagine that one-tenth of the petitions sent to your Majesty ever reach their destination?"

"Suppose you try again," said the Emperor quietly. "I am strongly inclined to think that the next time your petition will not be lost on the way," he added, glancing at the unhappy Governor, who, filled with impotent rage, was also in attendance.

It is needless to say that there was no occasion for any further petition to be sent, for the matter was settled in a day or two in a way that, if not altogether gratifying to the Governor's *amour propre*, gave complete satisfaction to his victim. This little incident, which was related to me at the time by one who was present at the assembly, reveals a type of character that is by no means rare among the better-to-do class of the *Odnodvortsy* in the Great Russian provinces. Perhaps a larger proportion of men possessing instincts of sturdy independence is to be found among them than in any other class in Russia.

Very many, it is true, have sunk to the condition of peasants, but the more prosperous have not been demoralised by the communal system, which has had such a disastrous effect

upon the peasantry, and to so great an extent has destroyed their very capacity for individual thought or action. On the other hand, they are generally untouched as yet by the passion for decorations and official distinction which has been the moral ruin of the Russian aristocracy. Those who enter the service of the State are rather in search of a livelihood than of a position in society. The Russian word for a noble, *Dvorianine*, i. e., "man of the Court," sufficiently explains that the whole class regards itself as depending upon the favour of the autocratic sovereign for its dignity and social position. An influential class of loyal and patriotic nobles and statesmen, who, though forming "His Majesty's Opposition" to-day, might be "His Majesty's Government" to-morrow, would be impossible in Russia. If in opposition, their official rank would disappear, and with it the whole of their social and personal influence. No other distinction being recognised in society than that derived from official positions, Russian nobles could never play the part of the old barons of England and secure a charter of full and complete personal liberty for themselves and the nation at large, or even aid the Czar in his efforts to counterbalance and correct the abuses and misgovernment of the bureaucracy.

It is from the *Odnodvortsy* that the purely

Russian trading and manufacturing classes of the towns are mainly derived, and when, now and again, the Imperial Government at St. Petersburg is startled by the audacious suggestion of municipal councils that some relaxation of the purely bureaucratic system of government is eminently desirable, the proposal almost always emanates from burghers derived from this class. Pre-eminently conservative, though not reactionary, the *Odnodvortsy*, whether as landowners in the country, or as settlers in the towns, are devoted subjects of the Czar, and Russian to their heart's core. [The depression that has so long rested upon agriculture is driving an increasing proportion of them into manufacturing and commercial life] and should far-reaching reforms ever be made in the government of Russia, this class, which touches so nearly those of the nobles, the peasants, and the burghers, may possibly play no inconsiderable part in establishing a healthier social system than now exists, and serve as a barrier to revolutionary movements on the one hand, or a reactionary policy on the other.

A very curious group of the *Odnodvortsy* existing in White Russia and Lithuania illustrates in a remarkable way the permanence of national types and religions in Russia. In the Middle Ages the Lithuanian sovereigns invited Moslem mercenaries to settle in their country as a

protection against the incursions of the Teutonic knights, and titles of nobility as well as grants of land were accorded to them. Their descendants remain to this day, and, unaffected by association with the Christian population among which they are scattered, have maintained their faith for centuries. With the rise of the Russian Empire, Moslemism has been driven back more than a thousand miles, but this little section has remained stranded in Western Russia within a few hours' journey of the Baltic. Though "noble," most are engaged in trade, especially as tanners, while a considerable number have become hotel-keepers in St. Petersburg and the larger towns. They have several mosques, and marry only among themselves ; but while in all other respects strictly conforming to the rules of their religion, they do not practise polygamy, and their women are not veiled. Something of their hereditary instincts still survives among them, as a relatively large proportion enter the army, but most of them retire into civil life on reaching the rank of captain.

As I am dealing with Russian life, I shall not allude to the Tartar and other Asiatic populations existing in many of the Russian governments ; but there is yet another European nationality that must be mentioned,—the German colonists of the Volga. These German settlers number nearly half a million, and those who are

established in the Volga district are descended from immigrants who came to this region in the eighteenth century, in response to the invitation of the Empress Catherine. Upon their arrival, they were promised the perpetual right of self-government, complete religious liberty, and freedom from liability to military service. Of late years, however, these privileges have been one by one withdrawn. They are now no longer exempt from military service, and this change has led to the emigration to America of several thousands of Mennonites, a Protestant sect which shares many of the tenets of the Quakers. Notwithstanding all the pressure put upon them, these German colonists, like the other minor European nationalities in the Empire, have successfully resisted every attempt to assimilate them to the Russian people.

In a museum at St. Petersburg the body of a mammoth is shown, which was discovered frozen in a solid block of ice. Hair, skin, flesh, the very blood remained unchanged. Through countless ages it had resisted all tendency to decay, or to mingle its ashes with the common soil. Such as it was when the ice closed around it, it remained to the end. All over Russia we can find in rural districts an exact counterpart of this physical preservation of the mammoth in the life of the non-Russian European inhabitants. They do not decay, they do not mingle



with and become merged in the mass of the nation, and in many cases they remain for generations exactly what they were when they arrived. The old German colonies on the Volga are a striking illustration of this. In language and religion, in their domestic habits and social customs, they remain exactly as they were when they first came to Russia, more than a century ago. They still wear the old German costume, they are closely shaved, and they even dress their hair in the fashion of their grandfathers. If they have not advanced, they have probably not greatly deteriorated. Their cottages are a complete contrast to the *izbas* of the Russian peasantry. They are solidly built and well furnished, in many cases with the same furniture that their ancestors brought with them from their old homes in the distant fatherland. All are able to read and write, and notwithstanding the terrible sufferings they have undergone of late years, through the successive famines which have been so exceptionally severe in their districts, they still evince in their demeanour a dignified consciousness of their superiority to the Russian peasants around them. **T**he repeated failure of the harvest, however, is driving large numbers of them either to emigrate or to swell the foreign element that already prevails so largely in most of the more important Russian towns, where they meet and speedily mingle with the newer

generation of settlers in Russia, the modern traders and manufacturers.

The incapacity of the Russian race to absorb European immigrants, who in other, and especially in Anglo-Saxon, countries, rarely maintain their distinctive nationality for more than a single generation, is an important factor that must be considered in forecasting the future development of the Empire. In one social class alone, the highest aristocracy, is this power of absorption to be found ; yet even there it is more apparent than real. If the Russian people are generally incapable of impressing their national characteristics upon other Europeans, no other European race is so susceptible of foreign influences as the educated Russian of the higher class. The consequence is, that the more influential sections of society are the most cosmopolitan and least Russian in character and moral constitution ; and this has made their apparent absorption of foreign elements a far more easy matter. As the mountain would not go to Mahomet, Mahomet has gone to the mountain, and foreigners have found no difficulty in "Russianising" themselves to the very small degree required by St. Petersburg society. As a natural result, no aristocracy in Europe, except perhaps that of Rome when the capital of the Papal States, contains so large and varied a foreign element. It is even larger than the prevalence of foreign names

might lead one to suppose, as many families, when established in Russia, assumed a Slavonic form of their patronymic, under which the original name is hardly recognisable. Even the Imperial family itself, though still bearing the name of Romanoff, is of almost purely German race, and now possesses hardly a trace of Slavonic blood. The last really Russian sovereign was the Empress Elizabeth, daughter of Peter the Great. Peter III., who succeeded her, and was the ancestor of the present Imperial family, was a prince of the House of Holstein. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the crowd of foreigners who thronged the Court of St. Petersburg, German favourites for generations received the most important posts at Court and in the army. When, in 1813, the Emperor Alexander thanked the Russian General Yermoloff for his services in securing a brilliant victory for the Russian arms, and asked what he could do for him, the General, a man somewhat of the character of the Knight of St. George I have mentioned, replied, "Only make me a German in your service, sire, and I shall be more than satisfied !"

But Germans are by no means the only foreigners who have swelled the ranks of the higher class of the Russian aristocracy. Nearly every nationality in Europe is represented there,—Swedes, Danes, French, Dutch, Greeks, Italians,

and even Swiss figure largely among them ; nor are descendants of British subjects, and especially of Scotsmen, by any means rare. The ducal family of Hamilton, for example, is represented in Russia by at least two numerous branches, and several other Russian noble families are descended from the Gordons, Bruces, Douglasses, Dugdales, Crichtons, Wylies, Mounseys, Mackenzies, Andersons, Barclays, and Keiths. The Russian Barclay families claim descent from the Barclays of Towie, or Tolly, near Aberdeen, and one of their number was the celebrated Prince Barclay de Tolly, who played so important a part in the military affairs of Europe from 1812 until the occupation of Paris in 1815. Of the Keiths, also descended from an Aberdeen family, was the famous Field-Marshal Keith, who prudently declined the offer of marriage made him by the Empress Elizabeth. The Russian Gordons regard as the founder of their family the celebrated General Patrick Gordon, the intimate friend of Peter the Great, who declared at Gordon's death that he "had lost the only honest man" in his dominions. This list comprises only a part of the contribution that Scotland alone has made to the Russian nobility, but it will give some idea of the cosmopolitan origin of a large proportion of the leaders of the official world in the Empire at this time, even though many among them now bear Russian names.

For many years the German element was in the ascendant, and the "Party of the Grand Dukes," as it was called, practically controlled the destinies of the Empire. More recently, new and even more potent foreign influences have made themselves felt. In all countries, but especially in Russia, the power of the capitalist is enormous ; and the immense extension of French and Belgian financial and industrial interests in most of the large and growing towns has had an effect upon the foreign policy of the Empire that no student of Russian affairs can disregard. This influence is exerted, not only upon the official world, but upon all the educated classes through the Press, in a large section of which nearly every question is treated from the French or Belgian point of view.





## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ORTHODOX CHURCH AND THE CLERGY

**I**F the Russian Court and the civil and military government of the Empire have been profoundly affected by foreign influences in the past, we find in the Church the one great institution of the State that is essentially national. For the great majority of the Russian people, devotion to the Orthodox Church is by no means a matter of religion alone. Of their fervent attachment to their faith there can be no doubt, but their intense loyalty to it has been immensely increased by the circumstances of their past history. No two nations could be more unlike than the Russians and Spaniards, but, notwithstanding, they have one characteristic in common. Both Russia and Spain were long under the cruel dominion of foreign invaders, the Spaniards having been crushed by the Moors, and the Russians by the Tartars, and for both, until the tyrants' yoke was broken, the National Church was the only rallying-point for the van-

quished race. The victory won, both Spaniards and Russians have ever since regarded devotion to their respective Churches as the touchstone of patriotism. In the case of the Russians, the Church means something beyond the creed that it upholds, and which individual members of it may, or may not, fully believe. It is not associated with dogma alone, but with a feeling akin to that with which the battle-worn flag of an historic regiment is regarded by those whom it has led on to victory. Renunciation of the National Church is, therefore, in the eyes of the bulk of the Russian people, not only an offence against their religion, but also an outrage to the most sacred symbol of the national victory over their alien oppressors,—an insult to the nation itself.

The attitude of the Russians generally to the Orthodox Church is one that from many points of view seems incomprehensible and contradictory to those who are unacquainted with the peculiar character of the Slavonic mind. I have already spoken of the dislike that is almost universally felt for the clergy, both priests and monks ; but this feeling by no means extends to the rites of the Church, even when performed by a priest whose personal character would make him shunned by every respectable member of his flock. This absence of personal influence among the clergy is one of the most striking

characteristics of the Russian branch of the Orthodox Church. Now and then, as in the case of the celebrated Father John of Cronstadt, a priest may acquire great popularity, but this is an extremely rare exception, and even when such occurs it is less the priest than the social reformer who is idolised by the people at large ; and the fact that such would-be reformers—not of religion, but of the every-day life of the nation—are looked upon with profound disfavour by the higher ecclesiastical dignitaries, vastly increases the esteem with which they are regarded by the laity. The rites and services of their Church are accepted without question by the majority of the Russian nation as absolutely divine ordinances. Their sacredness is impressed upon them by their association with their very existence as a people, and by the popular customs which have entwined them with many of the ordinary affairs of their secular life. The clergy, on the other hand, are only the officials who perform these rites ; and though the average Russian admits that they are divinely appointed, he considers that contempt for them personally is as fully consistent with his reverence for his religion as his aversion for the lay officials is with loyal devotion to the Czar.

Originally the Metropolitans of the Russian branch of the Orthodox Church were appointed at Constantinople. Their episcopal see was at



first at Kief, but after the Tartar invasion the seat of the ecclesiastical government was eventually removed to Moscow. Until this period the Metropolitans had generally been of foreign race, most frequently Greeks, but from this date they were nearly always Russians, and elected by their own clergy though still subordinate to the Greek Patriarch. Like the princes by whom Russia was then governed, the Metropolitan had to obtain a confirmation of his office from the Tartar Khan. The country, however, was divided among many princes, while at the head of the Church there was but one Metropolitan of "All the Russias," who naturally came to be regarded as the chief centre of national unity. Disputes between the civil and ecclesiastical governments constantly occurred ; but it was not until the Tartars had been crushed, and the country united under a single crown, that any serious attempt could be made to diminish the power of the Church. There were then, in fact, two sovereigns in Russia, the Czar and the Metropolitan, and the ecclesiastical chief enjoyed an authority as autocratic as that of the Czar himself. Possessed of enormous revenues derived from vast domains, he was also the supreme head of ecclesiastical justice, and all questions relating to marriage and succession to property, and many more, were in his hands alone. His court at least equalled that of the

Czar in splendour ; he had his own nobles, his own financial and other tribunals and administrations, and a perfect army of grand officers and officials. It was not until the reign of Peter the Great that this abuse of ecclesiastical authority was finally overthrown. The property of the Church was taken over by the State. The office of Metropolitan was then abolished, and his functions were transferred to a newly created body known as the "Holy Synod." The members of the Holy Synod are appointed by the Emperor alone, and consist of the three Metropolitans of Kief, Moscow, and St. Petersburg,—the successive capitals of the Empire ; four or five archbishops and bishops, and two representatives of the inferior clergy. The lay element is represented by the Procurator, and through him all real power is vested in the Emperor, as without his confirmation no act of the Synod is valid, and his confirmation is only granted with the sanction of the Czar. Associated with the Holy Synod are the Supreme Ecclesiastical Courts, and a vast number of bureaux, through which all the affairs of the Church have eventually to pass.

We have seen already how the civil government in the Districts and *Volosts* is practically a reproduction in miniature of that of the province of which they form a part. A similar system is adopted in the administration of the Church.



TYPICAL CHURCH IN A RUSSIAN COUNTRY TOWN

*From a photograph by the author*



The Empire is divided into bishoprics, to some of which the title of Archbishop is attached, and in each there is a Council, *Eparkhialnaia Consistoria*, with local courts and bureaux, corresponding with those of the Holy Synod, and a lay secretary, whose duties resemble those of the Procurator. In this highly centralised government every act of the most remote country priest must be reported to the Bishops' Council, and thence through the Procurator of the Holy Synod and his staff of officials to one of the numberless bureaux, where it is finally inscribed for future reference. The Procurator, called by Peter the Great "The Emperor's Eye," can thus lay his hand at once upon any priest who deviates by a hair's breadth from the lines laid down for him to follow.

"In this country," said a Russian statesman to me one day, "nothing is *permitted*. Everything is either done by order or forbidden." This remark, if a slight exaggeration in civil affairs, would not be far from the truth in ecclesiastical matters, and above all under the iron rule of the present Procurator, M. Pobedonostzeff. The Ecclesiastical Courts decide all questions relating to the Church, not only as regards the clergy, but in many cases the laity also, and this power touches the private life of the Russian people in many directions. M. Pobedonostzeff affirmed in a letter he published in 1888 that the Russian

Church and Government permit "absolute freedom of conscience." This is true in a certain sense, as there is no Inquisition to investigate what a man's private belief or disbelief may be. None the less, if a member of the Orthodox Church should venture to quit it and enter any other communion, he at once renders himself liable to prosecution and severe punishment at the hands of the Ecclesiastical Courts. According to the Russian Code, should he evince any *tendency* to change his religion, he is first to be taken before the pope of his parish, by whom he is "to be paternally exhorted and warned." Should he remain impenitent, he is next taken before the Consistory Court of the diocese, and finally, if still obdurate, he may, by order of the Court of the Synod, be condemned to a period of "ecclesiastical penance" in a monastery. Actually carrying out the intention and entering any other communion entails far more serious consequences, for in that case he would be deprived of all his civil rights, his property would pass to his next heirs, as though he were already dead, and finally he would be transported to a penitential colony. Should anyone secretly quit the Russian Church and join any other communion, his nearest relations, should they be aware of the fact and fail to denounce him, are liable to severe punishment, and so, too, is any person—a pastor of a Protestant community, for

example—who dissuades anyone from entering the National Church. Finally, the Code continues, “All civil and military authorities are commanded carefully to watch over and ensure the execution of these laws.” Besides these declarations of the Code, it is also enacted that all subjects of the Czar are members of the Orthodox faith if either of their parents belonged to that communion, or if any promise were given by the parents that the child should be made a member of the Russian Church.

Ecclesiastical prosecutions are by no means rare, and I may mention one or two cases that have come to my own knowledge. In one instance a young peasant orphan girl had been taken charge of by a Roman Catholic lady of Polish descent, and brought up by her in her own faith. Many years later it was alleged that one of her parents had really been a member of the Orthodox Church, and she was consequently arrested and taken before the Ecclesiastical Court of the diocese, where, however, she absolutely refused to deny her faith. Fortunately these local courts are by no means insensible to the influence of money, and her mistress, who was wealthy, succeeded in obtaining her release, to enable the village pope once more to try the effects of his eloquence upon her. Remaining obdurate, she was arrested upon several occasions, but each time with the same result.

Another case that occurred in the same district ended more disastrously. A young peasant girl, of Roman Catholic parentage, to escape the persecution of an agent of the estate upon which she was living, promised the village priest, in a document which she signed, that if he would use his influence to protect her, and she was thus enabled to marry the man to whom she was engaged, and who was also a Roman Catholic, all the children she might have should be brought up in the Orthodox faith. The bargain was agreed to, but years after, their children resolutely declined to carry out their part of the programme or to take the sacrament of the Russian Church. Their father was consequently arrested, and sentenced to a term of imprisonment for failure to exert his authority. After several months' detention he was released, it being admitted that his sons, who were grown up, were evidently beyond his control. The latter, however, were deprived of their passports, so that they could not quit the locality ; they were placed under the supervision of the police ; and at the moment when the facts came to my knowledge, in 1896, they were threatened with arrest and deportation to a penitential colony. In this case, before quitting their native parish, they would be compelled by force to take the sacrament in the Orthodox Church.

The hostility of the Holy Synod towards the



Roman Catholic religion may to some extent be understood on account of its association with the Polish Nationalist propaganda, but the no less vigorous efforts to "Russianise" the Protestant communities, especially those of the Baltic provinces, are less easy to be explained, as in their case there is no insurrectionary movement to be feared, and the Protestants are by far the most intelligent and progressive of the Czar's subjects. Very many examples of the activity of the Synod in this direction might be given, but one will suffice. The bulk of the inhabitants of Courland are Letts, while the landowners are chiefly German. Both are Protestants, but for generations there has been active hostility between the two races. A few years ago, at the instigation of the Holy Synod, a circular was sent to each of the households in a certain district. This circular the head of the family was required to fill up, merely stating if he was German or Russian. There was no allusion to his religion, and the word "Lettish" was omitted. The choice thus lay between Russian and German; and from the known hostility of the Letts for the latter race, there was no doubt what the reply of the unsuspecting peasants would be. Soon after, another and much more formidable-looking document was sent to each family, reminding them that they had officially declared themselves to be *Russians*, and warning

them of the pains and penalties they would incur should they fail to conform to the rites of the Orthodox Church. At the same time a list of their names was sent to the Lutheran pastor, who was forbidden, under pain of the heaviest penalties of the law, to admit any of these persons to the services, sacraments, or ministrations of the Protestant Church.

Besides their disciplinary powers for the punishment of "apostasy" from the National Church, the Ecclesiastical Courts also decide all questions relating to divorce, except, curiously enough, as regards the peasantry, who, of course, form the majority of the nation. The whole matter is practically in the hands of the lay secretary of the local Episcopal Court. The case is not tried openly, but the lay secretary makes a private investigation of the facts laid before him, and a report, based upon this investigation, is finally sent to the Holy Synod, which in due time pronounces the decree. The procedure is extremely expensive, not only on account of the fees, but, above all, because of the gratuities which have to be paid to the clerks of the various bureaux. The total number of divorces pronounced by the Holy Synod averages about one thousand per annum. The Russian people generally, however, regard divorce under any circumstances, even when granted by the tribunals of their Church, as a moral crime. In the middle classes

of society and among the peasantry it is extremely rare, though it can be obtained by the latter, without any great expense or difficulty, through their own village tribunals.

In yet another direction the Holy Synod exercises a profound and far-reaching influence upon Russian life. One of its departments is that of "Spiritual Censure," which controls all printed matter bearing in any way upon ecclesiastical history, theology, or philosophy. Nothing may be published touching upon any of these subjects without the prior sanction of this department of the Holy Synod ; and this rule applies equally to all such works printed abroad and imported into Russia. Even when the subject is treated in a way that would be fully approved by the Synod, the trouble and expense of obtaining the necessary permission are so great that, as a rule, editors of newspapers and publishers carefully abstain from questions that touch the spiritual life of the people, except when the idea can be covertly conveyed while dealing ostensibly with another subject.

The clergy of the Russian Church are divided into two sections, the Black, or monks, and the White, or ordinary parish priests, whose family life has already been described. The intense hostility between these two orders has passed into a proverb in Russia, and is mainly due to the fact that it is exclusively from the Black

Clergy that the bishops and other dignitaries are selected. Their lives are not much happier than those of their humbler brethren, however, for though bishops are admitted, as a matter of course, into the highest circles of society in St. Petersburg, they are generally regarded with almost as much aversion as the country popes are by the peasantry. The monks in the monasteries spend their time in fasting and prayer, and are not, like many of the Roman Catholic orders, engaged in any special work. The bishops in their official capacity are surrounded with a certain amount of display, but in their daily existence they are compelled to lead a life almost as rigorous as that of the monks, and even at official banquets are obliged to content themselves with fish and vegetables alone. Part of the hostility felt by the White Clergy for their more influential *confrères* is undoubtedly due to the almost military authority exercised over them by their bishops, and the extreme severity of the discipline in the seminaries, which are under the exclusive control of the Black Clergy. This severity frequently leads to violent outbreaks among the seminarists, and on the occasion of one such *emeute* in Moscow not many years ago the military were called in, and all the students were severely flogged by the Cossacks in the presence of the Metropolitan. Less than a century ago the bishops had the right to inflict

corporal punishment upon their clergy for trifling acts of insubordination, and to this day, a bishop, with the consent of his Consistory Court, can sentence a refractory priest to a long term of imprisonment. The fortress of Souzdal has been converted into a prison for some of the worst of those offenders, and is under the control of a clerical governor, whose disciplinary rule is looked upon with awe and dread by the White Clergy.





## CHAPTER XV

### RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AND RITUAL

THE question of religion permeates so completely every phase of the national existence that a description of Russian life would seem like a patchwork of incongruities if its religious aspect were overlooked. It is impossible to enter an Orthodox church in town or country without realising that the service, splendid though it is, represents something to the congregation far deeper and more real than a mere ceremonial formality. The language used is the old Slavonic, but this differs so little from modern Russian as to be perfectly intelligible even to the peasantry, who all join with hearty fervour in the singing and responses. No instrumental music is permitted; but most Russians have magnificent voices, and so natural a capacity for music that I greatly doubt if anyone who has heard the full, deep tones of the singing, even of a village choir, would not feel that the service would gain nothing by the use of an organ. No seats are pro-

vided, the congregation standing the whole time, exactly—to use an oft-repeated Russian expression—as they would in the presence of their earthly sovereign. This immobility is varied only by occasional sudden prostrations of the whole congregation which are distinctly Oriental, and sometimes almost startling to the foreign visitor. It needs but a glance at the vast crowd in any of the large cathedrals to recognise in the rapt attention of every worshipper a tremendous moral force that must be counted with, whether it be regarded as sincere religious feeling or sheer fanaticism. It is a force before which even that of the autocratic Czar must bow.

With all the machinery of the Holy Synod at his command, and with the whole body of the bishops to support him, the Emperor would not now dare to alter one word in the service, or abolish a single genuflexion. In the Emperor the great bulk of the nation, and especially the peasantry, have, it is true, unbounded confidence; but this feeling is by no means extended to the clergy. They know that petitions sent to the Czar through civil officials rarely reach his hand, and, judging by his experience of mundane affairs, the peasant is ever ready to suspect that the priest, an ecclesiastical official, might betray him too. Again and again a luckless pope has been beaten—one not long ago was actually murdered—because the harvest had failed upon

land which he had been called upon to bless. A typical incident that occurred recently will suffice to show how little confidence is felt in the clergy.

One of the most important sacraments of the Russian Church is that of the "Holy Chrism," which immediately follows the rite of baptism. The "Chrism" here used is prepared with great ceremony by the highest dignitaries of the Church at Moscow every three to five years, and is afterwards distributed to the priests for use throughout the whole of Russia. The preparation of this holy ointment, which can be made only in Lent, is a great and solemn ceremony. It is prepared in enormous silver caldrons, and contains oil, a variety of aromatic herbs, and other ingredients to which a symbolic signification is attached. The whole ceremony lasts for three days, and during that time the Gospel is read without intermission day and night. Towards the close of 1899 the ever-watchful Holy Synod discovered that in several provinces the wildest rumours were spreading among the peasantry in reference to the holy ointment. They varied in their exact form, but all agreed upon one point, viz., that either through carelessness, or with some deep sinister design, the bishops had omitted essential words in the consecration that were needed to give it its miraculous power. The horror and dismay thus created were by no



means confined to the ignorant peasants alone. Even in the towns and among the little landowners there was grave uneasiness and a conviction that "something had gone wrong" that might have the most appalling results. I am reliably informed that the rumour caused the Government at St. Petersburg great anxiety, for, had it spread beyond the Northern provinces in which it originated, it might very probably have excited a tempest of fanaticism that would have led to the most serious consequences. Every precaution was taken to prevent any allusion to this unfortunate rumour appearing in the Press in Russia or abroad. To contradict it would have been worse than useless, and only adding fuel to fire ; but immediately after Easter a notice was sent through the clergy to every parish in the disturbed provinces, to the effect that a new supply of the holy ointment had been prepared at Moscow, and that it had been duly consecrated in the presence of the Czar and Czaritza. Confidence was at once restored, as the visit of the Emperor and Empress to Moscow had been fully described in the Press, and the fact was specially dwelt upon that this was the first time since 1848 that the consecration of the "Holy Chrism" had taken place in the presence of the sovereign. Popular movements such as these, however absurd they may seem to Western ideas, could never be safely disregarded by the Government.

The Russians are still distinctly Oriental in many of the strongest traits of their character, and even in the British government of India it is fully recognised that indifference to national superstitions or religious beliefs might have disastrous results. The government of India, however, has always that of the British Empire to fall back upon for support, while the authority of the Czar rests upon the obedience of the Russians alone.

It would need a volume to describe the customs and ceremonies connected with the ordinary life of the people in which the Church is called upon to play a part. One of the most picturesque is the rite known as "Blessing the Waters." This ceremony, which takes place in winter, is performed with great magnificence in Moscow and St. Petersburg, especially when attended by the Emperor and the Court. The vast crowds assembled, and the magnificent pageant presented by the official and ecclesiastical authorities, form a spectacle that visitors will not speedily forget ; but one such celebration that I witnessed a few years ago, under widely different circumstances, seemed to me almost equally striking from its surroundings. Nothing, perhaps, gives a more curious sensation of complete isolation than a sledge drive over a vast Russian plain. The interminable waste of dazzling whiteness, the absolute silence save for

the rhythmic clang of the bells the horses wear, and the soft rustle like that of crumpling silk, as the sledge glides over the crystalline snow, all combine to give an idea of one's own insignificance compared with the vast space around, like that felt when one is in a small row boat far out at sea. I had taken such a drive to witness the ceremony in a rural district, when the coachman drew up near a huge cross, constructed of blocks of ice, that glittered like diamonds in the brilliant winter sunlight. Behind us was the plain we had traversed, in which lay several lakes that we had crossed, but at this season land and water are indistinguishable. In front was a forest with towering pines and firs, which stretched for miles beyond the horizon in not less impressive solitude and silence. At length, far away could be heard the sound of human voices, singing a strange, wild melody that recalled some of Wagner's music that I had heard at Bayreuth ; but here Nature herself had provided all that Wagner had sought to create by artificial means in his strangely placed theatre. Presently there was a movement in the snow among the trees, and waving banners appeared as a procession approached, headed by the pope in his vestments, and surrounded by the village dignitaries, venerable, grey-bearded patriarchs, bearing their highly prized *icons*. Slowly, and still chanting, the whole procession wound its way

through the trees to the cross, which had been erected on the ice, for it now appeared that this portion of the "plain" was yet another lake.

I shall not attempt to describe the mystic signification given by Orthodox theology to the ceremony of "Blessing the Waters," for the interpretation universally accepted by the unlearned in Russia is far more picturesque and typical. As winter approaches, all the wild creatures of the pathless forests quit their woodland homes and approach the haunts of men. So, too, do the forest demons, sprites, and fairies, once the gods the peasants worshipped, but now dethroned from their high estate. In the long, dark nights of winter they are ever ready to avenge the insult put upon them. The wolves that howl around the lonely villages at night may be driven off by purely human means, but what power can protect the peasants against the eerie shadows, ever watchful to work them ill, which they can just discern in the starlight, flitting to and fro over the snow, or hiding beneath the straw eaves of their *izbas*? To human eyes, that procession through the forest that I had witnessed consisted solely of sheepskin-clad peasants and their priest; but well they knew that, invisible to mortal eye, a strange and motley band of gnomes and sprites, fairies and harmless wood-nymphs, was marching with them. A wide space in the procession was left

for these uncanny creatures, and bright as the sunlight was, many a peasant would glance uneasily behind him from time to time, believing that some ghostly form had touched him. In that strange crowd are *Vodiamy*, water-sprites, who love to make their winter dwellings in the mills, and, once installed, will so bewitch the wooden machinery I have described, that at the least friction, when in motion, it takes fire. And there, too, could we but see them, is a group of weeping *Rousalkas*, water-nymphs, with silver skin and long green hair. Many a luckless *moujick* have their irresistible charms lured to his doom in some unsuspected morass, or beneath the glassy surface of a lake; but here, a like fate is awaiting the treacherous nymphs. And mingling with them are merry *Liashieĕ*, goat-footed woodland sprites, whose greatest delight it is to lure the unsuspecting traveller astray in the forest, and then leave him to starve.

These, and many more, had dwelt happily all the summer through in leafy dells, beneath the gnarled and twisted roots of fallen forest giants, whose once mighty trunks were then but a mouldering mound covered with ferns and wild flowers; and some had stolen their way unseen amid the whispering, nodding bulrushes that skirt the lakes and rivers, or played hide-and-seek among the water lilies. But the tyrant

Winter King had come, and their fairyland was crushed in his iron hand, and they — like the wolves and the foxes and the woodland birds — were trooping and flocking through the forest to the haunts of men, when strange, weird, human chanting met their ears. The spell of that rolling litany re-echoing through the forest in the still frosty air was irresistible, and on that waving banner was a device no spirit could see and disobey. One by one they had collected, unwilling but helpless captives, and taking their place in the space left for them in the peasants' procession, had now arrived at their appointed doom. The chanting still goes on as the crowd forms a circle around the glittering cross, and all look on with awe, as half a dozen peasants with their axes cut a large hole in the ice. The stroke of the axe rings out sharp and clear, like the clang of a bell, and the singing seems to become more tremulous as the fatal moment draws near. All are straining their eyes on that seemingly vacant circle, for now and again it is given to human vision to see the trembling group of sprites and gnomes and fairies even in the dazzling rays of the winter sunlight. And now the priest's voice is heard, deep and sonorous, as he pronounces the words of doom. Alas for the poor sprites ! Into that yawning chasm they must leap, and sink deep, deep, below the surface of that ice-cold water, that even now is

crusting over again. Shrinking from the shower of holy water that the priest sprinkles mercilessly upon them, one by one they disappear,—the crafty *Vodiamy*, the treacherous *Rousalkas*, the cruel *Liashieë*, and — most pitiful of all—the fair wood-nymphs who, innocent as they are, were all drawn hither by the magic of that potent spell. The priest could not have spared them, even if he had wished, for it is impossible to discriminate among spirit forms that one cannot see.

The ears of some — above all of children — we are told, can hear the low, blood-curdling wail of the hapless sprites, and fond mothers among the peasant women will cover the heads of their children at this moment lest that heart-breaking cry should reach them. Once, it is said, the wail of a wood-nymph was heard by a human maiden who, with her golden hair and deep blue eyes, was no less fair to look upon. Touched with pity, the tender-hearted girl, who now saw the nymph, sprang forward to seize her by the hand and save her from her fate, when she slipped upon the treacherous ice, and both sank together to the bottom of the lake. And when the Frost King was vanquished in his turn, and the ice was gone, and the sprites, released from prison, had all returned to their summer haunts once more, and jocund spring had turned the forest glades into a garden of

flowers, the nymph, who had forsaken her woodland home, might have been seen wandering, broken-hearted, upon the banks of the lake, amid the green-haired *Rousalkas* and laughing *Vodiomy*, ever mourning and bewailing the fate of the Christian maiden who had died to save her !

But with the spring new dangers arise for the peasantry, for the sprites are now all free again. Their icy prison has melted away, and their vengeance is dreaded more than ever from the unkind treatment they have already received. Once more the aid of the Church has to be called in, and cornland and meadow, byre and barn, must all be blessed again. This is a long affair, for the priest must visit every house in the village. The ceremony over, he receives a few *kopecks* to eke out his scanty stipend, and from each house also a glass of *vodka* that he must drink. But alas for human weakness ! This last gift from every householder in his faithful flock is sometimes his undoing, and the luckless priest finds himself utterly unable to complete his round of blessing. When not too often repeated upon other occasions, this fault is easily condoned, for it is evident that the unhappy man had only fallen, like a soldier on the battlefield, doing his duty to the last. A priest's intemperance, however, when no such valid reason can be alleged, now often entails severe reproof



from the bishop, and the excuses pleaded for this sad falling away are sometimes more ingenious than efficacious. One such fruitless plea was related to me by a Russian friend. A priest who had received a severe admonition from his bishop complained that he was most unfortunate, and in no way really to blame, as he had only got drunk with the very best of motives. He had been fighting a veritable crusade against intemperance in his parish, and when he allowed himself to become intoxicated, it was only to give his flock an ocular demonstration of what an irresistible enemy strong drink must be to body and soul, when it could thus degrade even their spiritual leader and guide.

As the year wears on, the services of the priest are called in again and again, for each ripening crop must be blessed ere the *strada* is over and the harvest garnered in. But besides these ceremonies, which are, of course, only to be seen in the country, many more are universal in the towns and cities as well. Notwithstanding the splendour of the Church services in large urban districts, however, their old-world character seems somewhat out of place when associated with the modern life and movement inseparable from a large town. In the country we seem to be transported back to days when the world was younger, and our feelings are more in unison

with all that passes around us. It is more difficult to believe in the existence of a water-sprite with the whistle of a river steam-tug ringing in one's ears, or in that of a wood-nymph amid the din and thud of a saw-mill. Yet even the saw-mill and the factory, prosaic as they are, do not escape the all-pervading influence of customs in which the Church plays a part. Every building, for whatever purpose it may be destined, is blessed by the priest when completed. This is one of the most pleasing of the Russian Church customs, for here, at least, there is little mixture of pagan superstitions with simple Christian faith. Every room of the house, every portion of the factory or workshop, is visited by the priest and his deacon, accompanied by the owner and his invited friends. The service consists mainly in the chanting of a litany in which a special blessing is implored for each room, according to the use for which it is destined. In the capitals and the large towns, this religious inauguration of the "house-warming" ceremonial among the richer classes is followed by balls and parties, to which a large number of friends are always invited. In Moscow, where the old national customs of all kinds are most generally kept up, these festivities are frequently organised upon a most lavish scale, especially when the residence to be "blessed" is that of one of the wealthy traders or manufacturers. In

the case of a factory the work-rooms are gaily decorated with flags and banners, and in summer with greenery and masses of flowers, while a feast is provided for the working people and their families with true Russian hospitality. The ceremony, indeed, is as universal as the English "christening" of a ship when launched. Even so prosaic a building as a railway station would not be regarded as duly inaugurated until blessed by the priest. In the country, this ceremony is never omitted even for the very poorest of *izbas*. Human nature, after all, is everywhere the same ; and the poor little shanty that the passer-by might hardly have glanced at has perhaps been the centre of hopes and anxieties, and possibly of pride and satisfaction, as intense as any felt by the millionaire owner of a mansion at Moscow. Only an *izba*,—just four walls, with a couple of rooms, a straw-thatched roof, and nothing more ! It might be an outhouse or a stable but for those two little glass windows, with their muslin curtains on each side of the door. And yet, if we think of all it represents, a halo of something more sacred seems to surround even those rough, log-built walls. Every one of the beams was the reward of long hours of arduous labour during the *strada* for the neighbouring landowner, who in return had permitted the necessary number of pines and fir trees to be cut in the forests adjoining the

peasants' holdings. Each tree, before it fell, might have had a little history of its own to tell, — a story of a young peasant and a village maiden, who had such deeply important matters to discuss that they had instinctively chosen the solitude of the forest glades to talk them over. The selection of each tree was a weighty matter, that called for deep and thoughtful consideration; and no wealthy bride ever gave more careful heed to the choice of her wedding trousseau than this village maiden to the size and soundness of the timber. The selection made, the trunk was deeply scored by the young peasant's knife with a mark that made that tree their own. And then, when the *strada* was over, with the aid of a few helpful neighbours the stately pine-trees were cut down, and trimmed, and carted to their destination. All the winter through they had lain by the roadside to "season" under the snow, but in the spring, while their feathered woodland neighbours were building their airy castles overhead, a like impulse seized upon the owners of those rough-hewn logs. Day by day the *izba* rose, till at length the thatched roof was covered, and a young fir sapling, firmly planted in the gable, proudly announced to all the world that the long-dreamed-of task was accomplished.

"Another act of folly!" growls the political economist. "What have they got to live

upon?" Well, it must be confessed, about as much as the sparrows that are flitting around them. But these simple, foolish peasant-folk believe, just as the sparrows do, that somehow their daily bread will come when it is needed; and they base that belief on words that the political economist has often heard when sitting, with his family around him, in blissful contentment with his own lot, in church. And then grey-bearded peasants, and the *Starosta* himself, had come and inspected the building when their day's labour was over, and one and all had gravely shaken their heads when they discovered chinks and crannies in the log-built walls where no chinks should be. But they were merciful in their criticism, for the builder was young and inexperienced. And then at length, the day before the wedding, the busy hands of friendly maidens were turning that *izba* into a mass of ferns and flowers. At early dawn the forest had been raided; and if the costly splendour of a palace was wanting to the new dwelling, the gifts brought in, true wild flowers, fresh from the bosom of Nature, untouched by human culture, were fairer far than aught that the skill of man could imitate. And then, when all was finished, the aid of the Church had to be called in, for to the young peasant and his bride every log in their humble nest was already consecrated by the love and faith and hope with which it

had been prepared, and they thought it good and seemly that, when it was complete, the blessing of their Church should rest upon it, too. So the much-maligned priest might have been seen approaching in his violet surplice and cylindrical head-gear. Grey and patriarchal, with long flowing hair and beard, he plodded wearily and painfully along the uneven road. A half-amused smile played upon his lips as he returned the salute with which he was welcomed, and glanced at the young couple who were shyly trying to hide behind a group of neighbours. He knew that at most but a few *kopecks* would be his recompense ; and this is a service that no law obliges him to render, but not the less it is one that but few priests would ever refuse. Nor is it the less willingly granted, nor is his voice less sonorous and sincere, as he chants the prayers that every blessing may rest upon every part of the *izba*, from the earthen floor to the straw-thatched roof, from his knowledge that the peasants behind him have all crossed their fingers to ward off the effect of the evil eye that they firmly believe he is casting around him, and when all is over, will only wait till he has toiled back again to his lonely home to begin their feasting.

Unlike the Roman Catholic priest, he cannot "take it out" of the offender when he has got him safe in the confessional box, nor put the

screw upon his wife to bring him to a better frame of mind. Confession, it is true, is necessary in the Orthodox faith the day before the penitent can take the sacrament, but it is made in open church. Bareheaded, his arms hanging limp, with his hands clasped and his cap suspended from his fingers, the peasant stands, the picture of contrition, before the priest, who asks him :

“ Have you stolen anything, got drunk, beaten your wife unduly, or told a lie ? ”

And the penitent's eyes twinkle between the locks of hair that fall over his forehead as he raises his head and replies with the guarded answer, “ *Batooshka*, I am a sinner ! ”

“ Quite true, my son,” replies the priest, a half-concealed smile playing over his bearded lips as he hands him the cross or the Testament to kiss, and lays the end of his stole upon his head as he pronounces the Absolution. The peasant's name is then inscribed upon the list that will eventually be sent to the Holy Synod, the fee is paid—only about twopence halfpenny—and as he turns away another peasant approaches to take his place. The priest sweeps the *kopecks* into a drawer with a sigh, for only about a halfpenny of it will come into his pocket, poor man, and he is thinking all the while how he is to provide bread and butter for his own bairns at home.

Poor priest ! Shunned by the peasantry, snubbed by the nobles, and browbeaten by his bishop, with the sword of Damocles ever hanging over his head, and the rigour of the monastery to his life's end, should he have the misfortune to lose his wife !







## CHAPTER XVI

### THE RUSSIAN DISSENTERS

ONE of the best-known Continental writers upon Russian affairs has declared that in his opinion the Russian people have not one religion but two, and that the majority are at once both Orthodox Catholics and pagans. So far as the peasantry are concerned, it is unquestionably true that a vast number of pagan rites and ceremonies are still regularly practised, even by zealous adherents of the Church. This is only one of the many anomalies for which the character of the Russian race is so remarkable, and in the *rôle* they will play in Europe in the future there may be surprises in store as striking as any that might occur among a purely Oriental people. For the Russians, patriotism, material well-being, and the pride of nationality are as completely mingled with devotion to their religion, and, above all, to its rites and ceremonies, as is the case among Moslem races or the Chinese. For the sake of their Orthodox Christian faith,

for instance, they gladly impose upon themselves hardships even greater than the Church demands. The total number of fast days—including two in each week—cover no less than a third of the year, and on these, meat, butter, eggs, and even milk, except for young children, are rigorously rejected. Children under twelve are not obliged to fast, it is true, but they are hardly gainers by the indulgence. In many of the rural districts of Great Russia they receive a sound whipping instead. But this is by no means imposed by the Church. Some years ago it was recognised that the mortality during and immediately after the four long fasts in each year—Advent, Lent, before St. Peter's Day, and the Assumption—was so considerable that the clergy were instructed by the Holy Synod to impress upon their flock that fasting to the danger of their health was a mortal sin. The admonition, so far as the lower classes were concerned, was absolutely unheeded, or, rather, I have been assured, did more harm than good, for the suspicious peasantry were convinced that the ecclesiastical authorities had some Machiavelian motive for tempting them thus to "cut themselves off" from the Church. The origin of this widespread suspicion of the clergy I shall explain presently, but one of its effects has been vastly to increase in the popular mind the value of many purely pagan rites that had long existed among them

as traditions, since for their celebration it is in no way necessary to call in the aid of the priest. These are very often used in addition to the rites of the Church which the priest has already performed, to make assurance doubly sure by keeping in well with both sides. Not infrequently a peasant will light two tapers before the *icon* or holy picture of St. George,—one for the knight and the other for the dragon ! Throughout the whole of Great and Little Russia rhymed magic conjurations are employed to avert a variety of calamities, and these exist in both Christian and pagan form. The two forms are used successively,—in the pagan an appeal is made to the elements and the “ thrice-blessed sun ” ; in the other, to the most Sacred Person of the Christian faith.

As might be supposed, the confusion of Christian saints with pagan divinities is almost inevitable. St. Blaise is confounded with Vlas, the Slavonic god of flocks and herds, and St. Elias, probably from his chariot of fire, with the god of thunder. He is believed to be extremely vindictive, and should his *fête* not be duly observed with the rites of the Church, he will often destroy all the crops with lightning. Very frequently the peasants, in their dread of his wrath, will attempt to appease him by additional rites of their own in his second capacity as a pagan divinity, so that he may choose whichever form

of homage he prefers. A stone altar is built, and upon it a certain quantity of rye or other grain is sacrificed to him by fire. It is essential that the whole of the grain should be consumed. But side by side with devotion to the rites of the Orthodox Church, and widespread belief in the efficacy of pagan ceremonies, the Russian peasant has deep down in his heart a third religion of a far different kind. Nowhere else on the Continent, except perhaps in some Protestant countries, is the New Testament, and, above all, the Gospels, so universally popular, and strange to say, not less among the very peasants who most rigorously conform to the rites of the Orthodox Church and privately perform semi-pagan customs of their own. In 1813, the British and Foreign Bible Society was established in Russia, and received warm support and subscriptions from the Emperor Alexander; and in a few years about three hundred branches were established in all parts of the Empire. In 1826, they were all suppressed by order of the Emperor Nicholas. This sudden change was due to the action of the supporters of the Roman Catholic party, but in the end it proved fatal to themselves. The Empress Catherine had greatly favoured the Jesuits. A large number of their schools and colleges had been opened, and Roman Catholicism had become extremely fashionable in the higher Court circles. The immense circulation of the New Testament,

and particularly the Gospels and the Psalms, among the middle and lower classes, was rapidly creating a strong Protestant feeling within the Orthodox Church itself, altogether opposed to the principles of the Court party at that time. The Emperor Nicholas was by no means favourably disposed to the spread of Protestant ideas, which he believed would be followed by a demand for an extension of political liberty, but he dreaded the Jesuits even more, from their sympathy with Polish aspirations. He settled the matter, therefore, by suppressing the Protestant Bible Societies, and at the same time expelling all the Jesuits from Russia. In 1863, a new Bible Society was established by Alexander II., under the auspices of the Holy Synod, but the funds by which it is supported come chiefly from abroad, mainly, it is said, from England. Only the Psalms and the New Testament are issued, and the number sold, about a hundred thousand copies a year, does not nearly meet the demand. In spite of the fascination that display and magnificence in religious rites exercise over Slavonic races, the simplicity of the Gospel story seems to be no less attractive to another side of that complex organism, the Russian mind. Among the middle classes, and those of the peasantry who can read, few perhaps would now be found who do not possess, or at least have not read, some portion of the Gospel.

Another and different phase of religious life is presented by the pilgrimages, not only to spots in Russia that are regarded as peculiarly sacred, but also on an immense scale to Palestine. The sacred relics at Kief alone attract nearly a million Russians annually from all parts of the Empire. Tens of thousands of these are poor peasants, who make the whole journey on foot for hundreds of miles, very many even from Siberia. Most are aged men and women, who in this last supreme effort are realising the dream of a whole lifetime. Week after week they toil on, getting over perhaps some ten or twelve miles a day, living upon the merest pittance, sleeping more often than not by the roadside, or in the shelter of a forest, and all the while with but one dread before them,—that they may break down upon the road and never reach the goal. Many reach it only to die, absolutely unable to attempt the journey home, unsupported by the enthusiasm that made them disregard fatigue and hunger on the outward way. In organising these pilgrimages the peasants form themselves into the inevitable *artel*; their small savings for years are clubbed together, and all march onwards under the leadership of their chosen *Starosta*, sometimes, though rarely, one who has made the journey before. There is hardly any sight more touching than that presented by these pilgrim bands; and, poor as the Russian peasants are, rarely

indeed will the wanderers pass through a village without being aided on their way. Such help is hardly ever asked for, nor is there often need, for the best that each peasant household can offer them is at their disposal ; only half a rye-loaf perhaps, though that means another fast day for the family, cheerfully accepted, and added on to those that the Orthodox faith enjoins.

One of these pilgrim bands that I met with in North-western Russia was bound for Odessa, whence it was to sail for Palestine. The whole journey to Odessa was to be made on foot, though means are now provided by which this can be avoided. "And your return?" asked a Russian friend who was with me, of an old couple, so weak and frail that it seemed as if it would be a miracle if they ever reached the port. "How do you mean to come back?"

"But there is no coming back," replied the old man quietly. "We are going to Jerusalem to die."

"But your children — you will never see them again?"

"Oh, yes ! we shall meet them there !" with an upward movement of his hand. The action and the words were impressive in their simplicity. It was no mere cant phrase ; for the whole expedition, as their passports proved, was a very grim reality, and but few of that band of aged pilgrims would ever see their

native land again. And as they passed upon their way, and their voices raised in trembling tones one of the favourite psalms they sing upon their pilgrimages, it was, we knew, for most of them like the fabled song of the swan.

In many aspects of Russian life that I have already described, the reader will have observed to how great a degree the mass of the nation is still living in the Middle Ages. In the country especially, over the greater part of the Empire, the existence of the people is that common to all Europe four or five centuries ago. The relations of noble and peasant, of employer and employed, have really been but little modified by the infiltration of Western ideas, or even by the Emancipation itself. We have seen how bands of itinerant skilled artisans still wander from one locality to another, wherever their services may be needed, just as the wandering guilds of builders did in other lands centuries ago. And here, too, old-world ideals in religious matters, and even prehistoric creeds, still maintain a slumbering existence, but, as is evident to all who know Russia well, may at any moment awaken, and awaken with the strength of a giant. Every other country in Europe has been tried in the furnace of the Reformation, and by subsequent successful or unsuccessful revolutions. This period of national development, Russia—that is to say, more than a third of all



Europe — has never reached ; and much that in other lands is now only a picturesque tradition of bygone ages is in Russia a living force of enormous power. Among these forces, the significance of which is fully realised in Russia, the national passion for pilgrimages to the Holy Land is by no means the least important. It is a fundamental belief of the Russian people, peasant, *bourgeois*, and middle class alike, that it is the mission of Russia to deliver the Holy Land from the “power of Antichrist” ; and for them Palestine is not only the “Holy Land,” but the “Promised Land” as well. The Russian pilgrims who visit the “Holy Places” now vastly exceed in number those of all other European races put together. The “Orthodox Society of Palestine,” which has been founded under the direct patronage of the Imperial family, assists pilgrims in every way. A special line of steamers is employed to convey them from Odessa to Jaffa, and immense refuges have been constructed along the route followed. It is no longer necessary to make the journey to Odessa on foot, though it is still done by thousands, as this is believed to render the act more meritorious. The society has so arranged that a pilgrim can now travel from any railway station in Russia to Jerusalem and return to his home for a total expenditure of about five pounds, living included. Very many village

communities subscribe this modest sum among themselves, and send a delegate to represent them. Should the community be too poor even to incur this expense, the society conveys the representative gratuitously. It is characteristic of Russian peasants, who will unblushingly adopt any ruse to avoid payment of taxes, that very few, even of the poorest, avail themselves of this method for getting their delegate transported to Jerusalem without any sacrifice to themselves.

“But,” the reader will naturally inquire, “how comes it to pass that the great bulk of the Russian people regard their clergy with suspicion and dislike, notwithstanding their evident devotion to the Orthodox Church, for the very existence of which the clergy are, in their belief, indispensable?”

A full answer to this question would explain one of the most interesting phases in Russian history since the time of Peter the Great. I can here give only the briefest outline, but the subject is far too important in its bearing upon the life and condition of the people of the present day to be altogether ignored. One of the most striking characteristics of the Russian people has always been their intense conservatism, and in nothing has this been more strongly evinced than in matters connected with their religion and their personal and domestic life. It was in

consequence of Peter the Great's reforms having touched both of these morbidly sensitive points in the Russian character that they met with a degree of opposition that nothing but his own iron will could have overcome. It led, however, to the formation of the large group of sects, now numbering many millions, known as the *Raskolniki*. The idea is very generally entertained that these dissenters from the Russian Church are all Protestants. This mistake arises from their being confounded with the far less numerous body of the *Stundists*, a Protestant sect created by the influence of the German colonists already mentioned. But the vast majority of the *Raskolniki* have nothing in common with Protestantism, to which, indeed, they are fanatically opposed.

We have already seen how much in the daily life of the people, from the building of a house or factory to the sowing and reaping of the crops, or even the changes in their existence due to the successive seasons, has for them a distinctly religious character. The masterful spirit of Peter the Great ignored all this. He was determined to Europeanise his people by force, exactly as attempts are now being made to "Russianise" the non-Slavonic elements of the nation. But his ukases relating to the national costume and the compulsory shaving of the men's beards produced as much consternation as the reforms of the present Emperor of China

would have done, could he have forced his subjects to wear European dress and cut off their pigtails. "I had rather lose my head than my beard!" exclaimed an infuriated peasant when the compulsory shaving operation was over. "Would *it* grow again when you are far away in your own village?" was the politic answer of many a magistrate, inwardly chafing that he, too, was condemned to "wear a German face," *i. e.*, a smooth-shaved chin, for the rest of his natural life. But the Russian people were the more disposed to resist these innovations, as they had already received a very serious moral shock in another direction. About a generation before, the Patriarch Nikone had a new translation of the Bible made (which is now accepted by the British and Foreign Bible Society) in place of the very incorrect one hitherto in use. Unfortunately, each letter in Slavonic has a numeric value, and from verses in the Bible many magic numbers were made up that were used in the affairs of every-day life. But the altered wording of the new translation upset a large proportion of these, and caused widespread dismay. Meanwhile the Czar Peter was steadily reorganising the Church. One by one new bishops were chosen among men whom he could rely upon to support his policy, and at last, with their aid, the office of Metropolitan was abolished, and the Synod established in its

place. The people were now bewildered by what they regarded as a deliberate attempt to destroy the most sacred characteristics of Holy Russia. The very calendar was changed, the date being counted from A. D., instead of, as previously, from the creation of the world, while the year began on January 1st instead of September 1st. It was this last change that revealed to the people what they would never have discovered if the date A. D. had not been adopted. Those who, faithful to the sacred character of Old Russia and the Orthodox faith, had protested against the new translation of the Scriptures, had been excommunicated by the Church Council held in 1666. This date, omitting the first figure, was, of course, the "number of the beast." No further explanation of all their troubles was needed. They were under the reign of Antichrist! Their bishops had betrayed them and thenceforward their confidence in the clergy was completely shattered. Once launched upon this line of thought, they made endless new discoveries. The letters in the word "Imperator," the new title taken by the Czar, unhappily exactly represented 666! By the exercise of a little ingenuity, that fatal 666 was found in the names of all the new bishops and in the title of every reform that had been introduced. Finally they discovered that "Assur," denounced by the prophet, was really the

"Russia" of the reformed era,— "*Russa* " written backwards ! For the majority of the nation there was nothing to do but sorrowfully to submit to the changes in all they held most sacred and, while clinging more closely than ever to the Orthodox faith, to deplore the defecation of the clergy. The more fanatical fled in thousands with their families to inaccessible forest regions, where *Skyti*, or hermitages, were founded, and peasants, townsfolk, landowners, and even nobles of high rank, formed new communities.

One of the earliest and most important established itself on the banks of the Vyg in Onega. Among their leaders were men belonging to the princely families of Denisoff and Mychetsky, and under their intelligent guidance a theocratic republic was founded and speedily became exceedingly prosperous. Though they had chosen the most remote district they could find, they were accidentally discovered by Peter the Great in one of his journeys: and so delighted was he with the good they had done among the half-savage peasantry around them, that he granted them numerous privileges and almost complete self-government. On leaving, we are told, he said that he would refrain from asking if they still regarded him as Antichrist !

Later on, in the reign of Catherine II., these *Starovery*, or Old Believers, as they now call

themselves, had greatly increased in wealth and numbers, in spite of intermittent persecution, especially in the vicinity of Moscow. They were now divided into two sections, the *Popovtsy*, who recognise as duly ordained those priests who consent to join them, and the *Bezpopovtsy*, or Priestless, who maintain that as the bishops have betrayed the Church, the apostolic succession is broken, and they have no longer the power to ordain a priest, or perform any episcopal function. A terrible outbreak of the plague having occurred in Moscow, both sections of the *Raskolniki* obtained permission from the Empress to open hospitals and two cemeteries in the vicinity, and the immense services they rendered led to their receiving the most extraordinary concession ever granted in autocratic Russia. Both hospitals and the extensive grounds and cemeteries around them were declared to be absolutely exempt from all official control. To these two sanctuaries the richer members at once transferred their warehouses and offices. Churches were erected and schools opened for their own children, as well as monasteries and convents for their monks and nuns. Though living in the old capital of despotic Russia, within their own domains they were practically in an independent State. From these two centres they controlled the religious bodies in communion with them all over the Empire, and early in the nineteenth century

their treasures possessed a capital of over twelve million roubles, an immense sum for so poor a country as Russia then was. It was hardly to be expected that privileges such as these could survive the reign of Nicholas I. Their churches were closed, but they were still permitted to maintain their hospitals and other numerous charities. The exact number of the *Raskolniki* in Russia at this time is not known, as very many, without really taking the sacrament in the Orthodox Church, arrange with the priest, in return for a small payment, to inscribe their names upon the official lists as regular communicants, but it is probably not less than twelve or fifteen millions. Their adherents now belong almost exclusively to the *bourgeois* and peasant classes, the latter being also nearly all artisans. The *Raskolniki* are almost entirely unknown in the higher classes of society, but their influence, nevertheless, is immense and increasing. In spite of their superstitions, many of which, especially among the *Bezpopovtsy*, are childishly absurd, they are almost always the most intelligent and prosperous of the class to which they belong. I have seldom, if ever, met with a *Raskolnik* workman who was unable to read and write,—a rare accomplishment among peasants of his class. As in the case of the Jews, their instruction and the knowledge of their trade are frequently acquired entirely at home.



In the large towns the *Starovery* merchants and manufacturers appear to be almost the only ones of purely Russian race who can always hold their own successfully against their German, Belgian, or Jewish competitors. In the country many of these *Raskolnik* (*Starovery*) communities own villages, with a considerable amount of land. One such community that I visited not long ago possessed over two thousand acres. Their *izbas* were well built, and on all sides there were evidences of perfect contentment and prosperity.

I have spoken of the Russian mind as being strangely complex, and in nothing, perhaps, is this more clearly proved than when we find, side by side with the practical common-sense of the *Raskolniki* in all the affairs of ordinary life, the strict observance of the most extraordinary superstitions. These, it is true, are not always observed by the wealthier members of the towns, but among their poorer *confrères*, and especially in the country districts, they are universal. The use of tobacco, coffee, sugar, or tea is regarded as a mortal sin, as these articles were introduced into Russia after the "reign of Antichrist" began. In no case can they eat with "unbelievers," and food not produced upon their own land must be "purified" before use by a special religious service. The members of the *Starovery* sects, however, have one superstition which

unquestionably contributes to their prosperity. The use of alcohol in any form would entail immediate excommunication from their community.

The second great branch of the *Raskolniki*, the *Bezpopovtsy*, are broken up into innumerable sects, which I shall not even attempt to describe. They are by far the most fanatical, and the rites of very many are almost entirely pagan. In throwing off the Orthodox Church, a great number of these sects seem simply to have fallen back upon the heathen beliefs of their ancestors which were still lingering among them. The customs of not a few are of a character that precludes their description here, and could not be tolerated in any Christian or civilised country. Sects such as these naturally become secret societies, which, from the peculiar character of the Slavonic mind, may play as important a part in the affairs of Russia in the future as similar associations so constantly do in China. It is impossible to have lived among Russians of various classes of society without recognising how large a proportion among them seem to be groping in the dark, and yearning for a something which they themselves can scarcely define. To give free scope for the attempted realisation of their conflicting dreams would almost certainly plunge Russia and her hundred millions into a state of anarchy that would shake all Europe. To repress them pre-

pare the way for hundreds of secret societies, which would at once spring into being and create as serious a danger, should the Empire sustain any great disaster or defeat.





## CHAPTER XVII

### LIFE IN WINTER

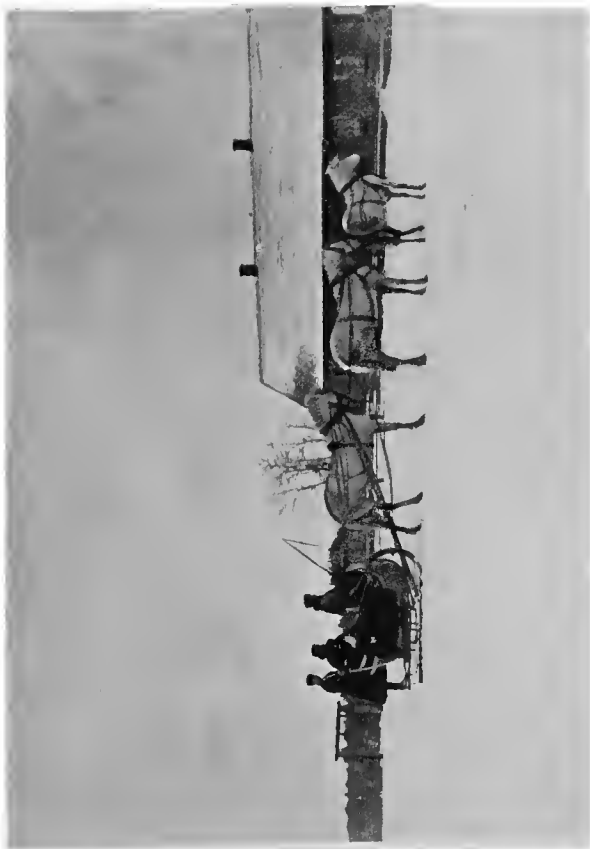
THE summer is over. As the autumn advances there are unmistakable evidences in town and country alike that a new phase of life is beginning for the whole of the Russian people. In St. Petersburg, hotels and shops are being prepared for the influx of visitors during the coming season. Private houses that had been shut up for months, while their owners were on their country estates or abroad, are being got ready for their reception. Everywhere there are signs of returning life and activity, for if summer is the *strada* season in the country, it is in winter that the Russian townsfolk hope to reap their harvests. In the manufacturing and commercial towns there is generally the same awakening. [Manufactories are altogether closed in summer, and only work in winter, when an unlimited supply of cheap labour is obtainable from the peasants who flock into the towns.] Very often the factory owner is himself

a landed proprietor, and, if not a wealthy man, he has probably spent the summer upon his estate, as deeply interested in the produce of his land as though he had never seen a loom nor heard the whirr and thud of machinery. And in the country, too, there have been signs of late of the coming change. The harvest is all garnered in. The last waggon loads have been taken to the landowner's barns, the peasants have received their share for their labour, and as they return at nightfall to their homes, with unhurried footsteps now, the strange and weird cadence of their harvest songs resounds from afar, over the moorland or through the pine trees, in the still evening air. Even now, though the fight is over, there is no ring of triumph in their voices, and each verse ends in a long-drawn-out wail, that sounds sometimes almost unearthly in the gathering gloom.

The next day probably that same long wail will be heard close to the *château* of the landowner whom I have taken as the central figure in this sketch of Russian life. Stepping out into the balcony, we should see a group of peasant women and girls standing on the lawn in front, radiant and smiling, despite the lugubrious minor key of their harvest song, and each with wreaths of corn, which they are swinging to and fro in their hands, beating time in rhythmic measure to the air. One among them stands in front

wearing such a wreath upon her head. In accordance with a time-honoured custom, the *Khazyaeeka* goes out to receive them, when the wearer of the corn-woven wreath approaches her mistress, and, after dropping on her knees and touching the ground with her forehead, places her coronet of corn-ears upon the head of the lady of the house. A few more verses are sung, and then all proceed to the end of the *château*, where a wreath, now brown and weather-stained, is suspended upon a hook against the wall. This is removed, and the new one put in its place, there to remain, to "bring luck to the house," until next year's harvest.

There is an increasing chill in the air as the days go on. Huge masses of dark, slate-coloured clouds roll over the wide plains from the west, followed generally by a fortnight of drenching rain, which converts all the low-lying land into a vast lake, or a seemingly endless morass. Once more, as in the spring, the roads are impassable, and neighbours living but a few miles apart are separated as completely as though a whole continent lay between them. The rain ceases for a day or two, and the brilliant green of the sodden vegetation and of the trees, which all still retain their foliage, gleams brightly in the returning sunshine. Two or three days later, and those vivid greens have all been transformed, by a touch of frost at night, into every imagin-



**SLEDGING**

*From a photograph by the author*





able tint of crimson and gold, resting against the background of the dark and stately pines and firs that now look almost black from the contrast, as their summits tower above the lower forest trees into the pure, transparent blue of the northern sky. There are generally but a few days of this gorgeous colouring,—so brilliant that the landscape would seem strangely crude and unreal were an artist to attempt to transfer it to his canvas as it really is. Fierce winds from the north and east roll back the ocean of clouds, now charged with blinding snow, while the temperature is falling hour by hour. As the cold increases, the wind drops and the clouds disappear.

Looking out of his window next morning, the visitor would gaze upon a new Russia, and one that differs as completely from the Russia we have seen hitherto as though it were situated in another hemisphere. There is everywhere a striking physical contrast between summer and winter, but in Russia that contrast affects nearly every phase of life as completely as it does the whole aspect of the country itself. The rough, uneven roads have vanished, and for the visitor who has never yet enjoyed a sledge-ride, a never-to-be-forgotten pleasure is in store. Later on in the season, when the sledge roads have been worn down by constant traffic until the frozen soil below is reached, it will be widely different, but now the traveller skims along over

the newly fallen snow without the faintest jar or vibration. The horses are probably harnessed in the well-known *Troika* fashion, three abreast, but in many parts of Russia, especially when driving along narrow roads through the forest regions, two, three, and sometimes even four horses are driven as in a tandem, a mode that calls for considerable skill on the part of the coachman. A "spill" from a sledge, even when the horses are galloping at full speed, is not a serious matter, however, and is generally treated as a joke. A fall, so long as one is not flung against a tree, does no more damage than if one had been tossed into a feather bed, and a visitor, on his first sledge-drive with Russian friends, rarely escapes this experience when a suitable spot is reached. The snow, as dry as salt, is soon dusted off the furs, and a moment later the sledge is dashing along as gaily as ever. The driver is usually so seated that he is almost standing, with his feet firmly planted against the foot-board. He holds the reins one in each hand, for Russian horses are very hard-mouthed and he needs all his strength to guide them. The whip is hardly ever used, nor is it needed, but all the while the coachman urges them on with loud, guttural cries and "unparliamentary" language that fortunately the foreign visitor will most likely fail to understand. The horses do, however, and though not otherwise ill-treated,

they resent it by flinging volleys of snowballs from their hoofs at the faces of the occupants of the sledge as they gallop along. As a protection against this, their hindquarters are covered with a net of woollen cord. In grand equipages in Moscow and St. Petersburg, silk is used instead of wool.

Winter in a temperate climate gives but a faint idea of the beauty of that season in Russia. For weeks there is often an absolutely cloudless sky, while the snow that has accumulated on the spreading branches of the pines and firs assumes every kind of fantastic form. During the greater part of the day all is clothed in a mantle of dazzling whiteness ; but as evening approaches there is often no lack of the most brilliant colouring conceivable. In no other country, not even in the extreme north of Scotland or Orkney, have I seen such brilliant sunsets. The colour is reflected by the snow, and frequently with almost startling effect. At one moment the whole landscape is bathed in red light, and every mound of snow is tinted with crimson or rose, while the long shadows they cast are of the contrasting colour, a delicate green. The rosy light soon becomes orange, and every shadow then is the purest blue. Change after change comes successively in this long-drawn-out northern sunset, until at length the sun sinks yet lower below the horizon, when the sky above and the

snow beneath are all flooded with golden light, and the shadows change to ever-varying shades of violet.

Many writers upon Russia have given their readers the impression that the Russian nation, as a whole, except the fashionable world at St. Petersburg, passes the winter months in apathetic idleness ; the middle classes sleeping their time away, and the *moujik* and his family huddled together upon the stove. This picture, if applied to the bulk of the nation, would be absolutely unreal and grotesque. The Russians, it is true, have but little taste for outdoor sports, such as those that give a special charm to the winter season in Canada, though the climate there is equally severe ; but none the less the winter months in Russia, even in the country, call forth many and varied occupations. In the *château* of the noble landowner, and in the humbler residence of the *Odnodvortsy*, there is work that must be done ; and even a large proportion of the peasants find profitable means of passing their time. In the *château* the wife and daughters of our landowner friend will have their hands full until the spring comes round again, if their fortune should be such as to preclude the possibility of a visit this year to the capital or abroad. For them, as well as for their neighbours of the *Odnodvortsy* class, there is, among a thousand other matters, the household spin-

ning and weaving to be organised, and baskets to be woven for the dried fruit that will be prepared next summer. The cattle and pigs that have not been sold, and cannot be kept the winter through, will be killed, and must be salted down for future consumption at home. Ham and bacon have to be smoked for home use or for sale, and every Russian housewife vies with her neighbours in the perfection with which she can prepare these delicacies, which are but little known abroad. Each has a special recipe of her own, with carefully calculated proportions of pine twigs, juniper, dried fern leaves, and bundles of aromatic herbs, which should be employed in the smoking process to give the exact flavour required. At this season, too, the "solid soup," which plays an important part in the Russian *cuisine*, is prepared. Several hundredweights of beef and mutton, instead of being salted, are boiled down, bones and all, in huge caldrons, for more than a week, and to this any game, especially hares, that can be procured, are added. When at length the meat is completely dissolved, the whole is carefully strained, and then boiled down till, in its concentrated form, it is finally dried into a substance suspiciously like glue in appearance, but from which, notwithstanding, delicious soup can be made in a few minutes all through the summer, when every moment has to be utilised.

The peasants, too, at this season, kill the pigs they are unable to feed, but this does not entail any great amount of laborious preparation. They simply have their throats cut, and are frozen where they fall. They are afterwards carted to market, and a more ghastly sight could hardly be imagined than a regiment of a hundred frozen pigs, leaning against a wall in the market-place, all set up on their hind legs to save space, in the exact attitude, and with the same expression upon their faces, that they had when they breathed a last adieu to all the sorrows of this life.

[I have already mentioned the enormous number of peasants employed in the transport of agricultural produce of all kinds to the nearest railway station, river port, or canal. This is really a highly important branch of the national trade, giving occupation to tens of thousands ; and it is easy to sympathise with the intense hostility of the peasantry to the extension of the railway system. Little by little, branch lines are penetrating into remote rural districts : but though many long years must elapse before they will radically alter the social and economic conditions of life of the vast majority of the people, such as I have described, still their first effect, wherever they are opened, is to deprive the peasantry of one of the most important branches of their revenue.] The world has moved so

quickly of late, that it is difficult to realise that a century ago Russia occupied the first place among European countries for the cheapness and rapidity with which the land transport of merchandise could be effected. The facilities for travelling and for the conveyance of goods provided by the sledge—then the easiest and cheapest of all modes of transport by land—gave Russia, for half the year, as great a physical advantage over most other Continental countries in this direction as Great Britain possessed by her countless roads over the ocean wave. Visitors to Moscow a century ago recorded their amazement at finding, when dining with wealthy nobles in mid-winter, fresh fruit and vegetables that had been brought by rapid sledge transport from the South, luxuries that no money could, at that time, have purchased in Paris, Berlin, or even London. To the sledge road alone, Russia owed the possibility of her rapid advance to the East, in which her Empire has increased at the average rate of a little over eighty square kilometres a day since the reign of Peter the Great ! The Russians, gliding eastwards over the snow, won their grand empire of Northern and Eastern Asia, just as the Anglo-Saxons, ploughing their way westwards through the ocean, won theirs on the other side of the Atlantic ; and both now are face to face upon the eastern and western shores of the Pacific,

This thought is forced upon our minds as we watch the peasants flocking along the country roads in their little sledges, in bands of tens and scores, but in an aggregate of scores of thousands, for the nearest railway stations, whence they will be transported to the towns. Men and women, boys and girls, so long as they are old enough to work, are all flocking to the centres of modern life, just as the fabled *Vodiamy* and *Rousalkas* are believed by them to quit the forest at this season for the village hamlets. Apart from the many thousands who year by year emigrate to Asiatic Russia, nearly all the peasants we now see flocking to the towns are interested indirectly, but very closely, in the development of that great Eastern Empire, and so also is the factory owner who is now returning to his duties as a manufacturer after living the summer half of the year as an agriculturist. His clerks, if Russians, probably belong to the *Odnodvortsy* class, and in leaving their little farms in winter for their town labours, their interests, too, like those of their employer, are bound up with Russia's commercial development in the East. To explain this, I must trouble my readers with a few dry facts which throw a flood of light upon the economic position Russia now occupies in Europe, and, above all, upon the rôle she will almost inevitably be compelled to play in the near future. According to a care-



fully worked out estimate prepared for the Russian Government a few years since by Professor Mendeléef, of the St. Petersburg University, a well-known authority, the total amount of labour required by agriculture in the whole Russian Empire could not, under any circumstances, occupy more than five thousand million working days per annum. With the present population of the Empire the number of working days available in each year is a little over ten thousand million, and this is based upon the very moderate estimate that only five-twelfths of the people are engaged in labour of some sort, and work for only two hundred days per annum. Agricultural labour, therefore, can only provide occupation for, at most, but half the time that the Russian people already have at their disposal. As we have seen, that half is employed in the six months of summer only, and by no means suffices to supply the entire nation with adequate means of subsistence for the whole year through. The national well-being renders it indispensable that the remaining five thousand million days should be employed in some remunerative occupation apart from agriculture ; and this is the more imperative as the population is now increasing at the rate of over a million per annum.

This relief can evidently be found only in an extension of Russian manufactures. But

factories would be useless without markets for the sale of their produce. As the youngest of the manufacturing countries of Europe, Russia could hardly hope to compete, at least for the present, with other nations in the open markets of the world. But there are others that lie at her doors. Shut out from all possibility of selling her manufactured products in Europe, they have flowed eastward in a steadily increasing stream, and Russian manufacturers look to China, as the Russian pilgrims do to Palestine, as their "Land of Promise." There is much in this question, which I can only touch upon here, to give anxious food for thought to other manufacturing nations which have their own interests to consider, — interests of not less vital importance to their own well-being. Meanwhile, we must remember that Russia already possesses an amount of practically unoccupied labour, which can only find an outlet in manufactures, equal to the total amount of labour obtainable in the British Islands or in France, and that this is increasing with the increase of Russia's population of a million per annum.) Hitherto the Russian competitors with the manufacturers of Western Europe and America have been shut in by the barriers of ice, physical and moral, by which they have been surrounded, just as the forest elves are imprisoned when shut down by the priest beneath the frozen surface of the lakes

and rivers. But now that icy barrier is as surely giving way before the Russian manufacturer—*moujik* and master—as does the snowy crust of the lake each spring when the thaw sets free the dreaded sprites. When that moment comes, however, the manufacturers of the West will find no means of conjuring back to their northern plains and forest the armies of Slavonic artisans, with their annual five thousand million free days that they will be devoting to industrial competition.

A great part of this awakening industrial development belongs to Poland and other non-Russian portions of the Empire in Europe, and has therefore no place in this description of Russian life. [But in Russia, properly so-called, there is also a constant and ever-increasing movement of the population to the urban and manufacturing centres. Much of this, as we have seen, partakes of the nature of an annual tidal flow backwards and forwards between town and country, as in the present curious transition state of the Russian nation a large proportion of the people could not possibly support themselves entirely by either manufactures or agriculture alone, and are compelled to take both in turn. But with each flow of the tide a larger and ever larger number is left among those who depend wholly upon manufactures throughout the year, and the number of these is thus increased, and

new industrial centres are being constantly founded by the development of the *kustar* trades to which I have already alluded. The place in the national life which these *kustar* communities take is so exceedingly curious, and so essentially Russian, that they must be treated apart, and we will first glance at the life of the temporary immigrants to the manufacturing towns and that of the more permanent inhabitants.





## CHAPTER XVIII

### TOWN SOCIETY

FOLLOWING our landowning friends on their return to town, we shall meet with them under very different circumstances than hitherto. Nevertheless, what we have seen of their country existence, much as they dislike it themselves, has given us a far better insight into their real character, and perhaps enabled us to appreciate it more highly, than would have been possible had we received our first impression of them under the artificial conditions of society life. The more wealthy among them take up their residence in their own town houses for the season, but very many, whose fortunes would preclude their enjoying such a luxury, content themselves with hiring furnished apartments in a flat, just as they would in London or Paris, or take rooms in a hotel for a shorter period. In St. Petersburg, visits are often paid at an hour when in other cities the bulk of the inhabitants are sleeping the sleep of the just. We have

been dining with friends, then looked into a theatre for half an hour, just to see who was there, afterwards paid half a dozen "duty visits," and now, though it is near midnight, we will look up our landowner friends in their town abode. As we enter the brilliantly lighted drawing-room, we shall find a party of a dozen other Russian friends of the same social class, who have dropped in, like ourselves, to welcome the newcomers back to town. Most of them probably spent the summer upon their estates in exactly the same way; and when they are alone ruefully reflect upon the falling prices of corn and butter, bacon and cheese. Perhaps some among them were neighbours, as neighbours are counted in Russia, living not more than forty miles away. But not a word, if you please, about all the "horrors" of that dreadful summer's exile!

The old Countess is sitting with a little group of her own contemporaries at a card-table, very erect and dignified, but with a visible expression of relief upon her face that she has at length got back once more from barbarism to civilisation, the loss of which she was ever lamenting when the family, tired out with their day's work, were resting in the gloaming of a summer's evening on the balcony in the country. Her daughter-in-law, the busy house-wife of the *château*, is talking eagerly with her

friends about all the doings at Court, the coming marriages, or the latest official appointment. They are all filled with commiseration at the woful fate that has befallen an official friend of theirs. It was discovered in high quarters that he had published an article in a foreign review without previously obtaining permission from his "Department"; and for this high crime and misdemeanour he has been sentenced to two years' residence upon one of his country estates. This form of punishment is frequently adopted as a disciplinary measure for any breach of the rules on the part of an official, and does not tend to increase the popularity of country life. Should the victim survive it, however, he will probably find in his increased banking account ample means for consoling himself for all his sorrows when he is free once more. }

Our host is the centre of another group, and is engaged in animated conversation, when another friend comes in,—just the very man they wanted to see! A foreign newspaper had arrived a week before, with a paragraph "blacked out" by the censor, and all St. Petersburg was waiting with curiosity to know what it could have been. The newcomer has a friend in the foreign capital where the paper was printed who has sent him half a dozen cuttings of the condemned extra in an envelope. With the best will in the world, the post-office cannot open every letter.

and they have reached him in safety. The extracts are eagerly handed round, but a moment after there is a look of disappointment and puzzlement upon everyone's face. What can it mean? Once again they have been sold! For a whole week St. Petersburg society has been using its ingenuity in every way, with chemicals and with the microscope, to discover something of what that paragraph contained, and with a word here and there, aided by vivid imagination, had built up an attack upon the Russian Government that it was delicious treason even to think of. And here was the reality. Nothing, absolutely nothing, about Russia at all, but merely a description of an innocent yacht race!

"*Gloupietx*; idiots," exclaims an irascible old colonel, "I believe it was done on purpose to humbug us!"

"Not at all," remarks a highly decorated civil official, dropping his *pince-nez*, and handing back the extract. "It is a thing that often happens. The instructions were misunderstood, that is all. The clerks 'blacked out' the wrong paragraph, and the one they ought to have effaced nobody ever noticed."

Human curiosity is the same all the world over, and not less universal is the pleasure of outwitting an interfering bureaucracy whenever it can be done with safety. If there should



be a little danger it only adds zest to the enjoyment. In St. Petersburg society, paragraphs "condemned by the censor" are eagerly collected, and often gummed into albums,—the "blacked out" version on one side, and the uneffaced extract, obtained through the kindness of friends abroad, upon the other.

And now begins a general conversation upon Russian politics that I need not record ; but were the reader present to hear it, he might be not a little astonished at the freedom with which national institutions of every kind are examined and criticised. Here, in the capital of autocratic Russia, where no one can travel from one province to another without conforming to the passport regulations, every question of Church or State is as freely discussed by officials of unquestionable loyalty and devotion to their Emperor as they might be in London or Paris. Over and over again a young officer will unhesitatingly express opinions in the presence of his colonel in a private salon that, written or printed, would entail for him the most serious results.

The same thing would be found in all ranks of society ; and no mistake could be greater than to suppose that there is no such thing as public opinion in Russia, notwithstanding the strict control of the Press. On the contrary, it is a great and growing force ; and free expression of opinion, so long as it does not develop

into an organised opposition and is not circulated in a written or printed form, is actually encouraged.]

Many a political project that had been proposed in the highest quarters is quietly abandoned when it is found that the general consensus of public opinion, thus expressed in conversation, is distinctly opposed to it. The private reports of local officials all over the country, sent to the Governor of the province, and by him carefully sifted and sent to the Minister to whose department the question belongs, often influence in the highest degree the most important political measures.

Quitting our friends at length, we promise to dine with them next day, before setting out for Moscow, where we shall study the town life of other sections of society, of whose country existence we have already seen something. An invitation to dinner in Russia means to dinner only, and as soon as the meal is over the guests take their departure to call upon other friends. In this round of visits later in the evening they will often come across their host and hostess again. In St. Petersburg, in some families, French dishes only are served, but this is decidedly exceptional, and, as a rule, the *menu* is almost exclusively Russian. The meal always begins with what is called the *Zakouska*. This is not served at table, but placed upon a side-

board, and consists of a number of cold dishes, to which the guests help themselves. *Iekra* (caviar) is one that the foreign visitor will, of course, be familiar with, but there are many more that will be altogether new to him, and so appetising that, when dining at a restaurant, he will often be tempted to begin and finish his dinner with the *Zakouska*, and never approach the dining table at all. On that sideboard he will find slices of delectable smoked Russian ham, with the peculiar aroma of the many carefully chosen aromatic herbs that have been employed in its preparation. The thin-cut slices of *Balik* (smoked sturgeon) are equally delicious, and so, too, is the *Siomga*, or dried salmon. If he objects to eating raw fish, he will do well to ask no questions as to whether these delicacies underwent any other form of cooking than that of smoking. There is, besides, a great variety of conserves of potted fish, crawfish, chicken, ham, and game of many kinds. The foreign visitor will be wise, however, not to place himself entirely in the hands of his host and hostess, for Russian hospitality is proverbial, and if he gave way, he would find that he had finished his dinner with the *Zakouska*,—its simple introduction. Nearly all these varied viands are the work of fair Russian hands in many a far-away *château*, all over the country. So, too, are the many kinds of cheese on the *Zakouska*

sideboard, and the dried fruit, wines, and liqueurs which will be pressed upon the guest.

I shall not attempt to describe the Russian liqueurs, as their name is legion. Many are made from fruit of various kinds, and others derive their flavour from an immense variety of aromatic plants, wild flowers, and leaves, gathered in the Russian forests and moorlands. The well-known Russian *kvas* is so universal a beverage among Russians of every class, from the Imperial family to the poorest peasantry, and is so little known elsewhere, that some readers might like a recipe for making it. Two pounds of barley-meal and about a pound of honey are placed in a large earthen jar with about a quarter of a pound of salt. Upon this two gallons of boiling water are poured, and the whole is well stirred. It is then placed on a part of the stove where it can be kept scalding hot, without being allowed to boil, for twelve hours. It is then strained, and left for five or six days to ferment slightly. The foam that rises is then skimmed off, and having been strained again, it is fit for use. It is non-alcoholic, and is certainly a very refreshing drink in summer. When bottled for two or three days it effervesces like soda-water, but great care must be exercised for the bottles are apt to burst, if carelessly handled, with disastrous results. This *kvas* forms an important ingredient

in many Russian soups. *Botvinia* is one of the most palatable of these, and may almost be described as a "liquid salad," the rather acid *Kvas* taking the place of vinegar. Slices of cold boiled salmon or other fish, carefully boned, are placed in the tureen, and to this are added finely sliced lettuce, spring onions, cucumbers, and various kinds of herbs. The *Kvas* is poured on cold, and the whole well stirred, when about a quart of cream is added, and the "soup" is served with small lumps of ice. Another dish that I must mention is *Stchie*, as it is universally taken by people of all classes of society. Two or three pounds of half-fermented cabbage, the mode of preparing which I described in an early chapter, is chopped up with the same weight of cold boiled mutton. This is placed in a saucepan with about two quarts of *Kvas* and half a pound of fresh butter. Salt is added, and also a piece of the solid "soup" I have already mentioned. When boiling, about a quarter of a pound of pearl barley is added, together with dried or fresh herbs, according to the season. The poorer peasants make their *Stchie* without meat, except on Sundays and festive occasions, and add linseed oil instead of butter. A complete description of the favourite Russian dishes would far exceed my capacity, but two others I must mention—roast sucking pig and roast half-grown chickens. The latter are killed when

not larger than an ordinary-sized pigeon, and are served simply cut in halves lengthwise. Even half a chicken at such a tender age will not be found too large a portion by those whose appetite has been sharpened by the keen Russian air.

Among the invited guests the reader will find some types of Russians that we have not met with hitherto. I will introduce him first to a fussy old doctor, who has button-holed a diplomatist, with whom he is having an eager discussion about quarantine regulations, and the possible introduction of the plague into Russia, quite oblivious of the fact that everyone else has left the *Zakouska* sideboard, and the regulation dinner has begun. He is rather a celebrity in his profession. He holds some position at Court, and is highly decorated, one of the last decorations he has received giving him the *Tchin*, or rank of a general, and the right to wear a uniform, although he is in no way connected with the army. His wife is a striking contrast, both physically and morally, to her nervous little husband, and like many other Russian ladies possesses a highly developed business capacity, in which the men, especially among the higher classes, are so often deficient. She has a large fortune, and this, by Russian law, is entirely under her own control. A few years ago she invested part in buying a large

estate in a remote district, and, dispensing with the services of a chief agent, undertook its entire administration herself, for she was resolved not to be taken in by anybody. At this dinner party her dress is chiefly remarkable for its magnificence, but had anyone been so indiscreet as to call upon her when living in "Russia behind the veil," they might have found her tramping over the fields in top-boots and a man's overcoat, and looking altogether a very formidable personage indeed. Her husband has hitherto declined all her invitations to pay her a visit upon her property. He has a profound respect for his masterful wife, but somehow he feels happier when he is safe in St. Petersburg. She makes him a regular allowance, and has now run over for a few weeks to look into his accounts.]

Another type is presented by a young noble in the diplomatic service. An excellent linguist, a brilliant conversationalist,—and brilliancy in this direction is an art in which Russians excel,—his main object in life is to convey the impression that there is no subject in art or literature, no question of science or politics, upon which he is not able to express an absolute and decided opinion. In playing this *rôle*, the quickness and vivacity of his Slavonic blood stand him in good stead ; and the moment he finds himself getting into deep water, he will turn with

lightning speed from the latest discoveries in wireless telegraphy to the present condition of the French drama. A striking contrast to our brilliant young friend is his neighbour, a specimen of a relatively new class in the higher sections of Russian society,—the financial diplomatist. He holds no regular Government appointment, but has evidently rendered some service to the State, as he wears a decoration of a high order. He does not belong to any known Russian family, and no one seems to have any knowledge of his origin, but, all the same, he goes everywhere and knows everyone. ¶ In reality he has not a drop of Russian blood in his veins, but, though born in Russia, is of foreign parentage. He has lived a good deal in England, speaks English fluently, and has taken as his model an English officer of the old school, — bluff, good-natured, and hearty in his demeanour, but gentlemanly withal. As surely as the presence of the swallow betokens the coming spring, so surely may his presence in any European capital be regarded as the precursor of some great Russian financial, commercial, or industrial project that is looming in the near future. ¶ Near him is seated a man of a vastly different type. A member of one of the oldest Russian families, and possessed of a large fortune, he adopted the unusual course, for a Russian of his social class, of seeking no official



position of any kind. He has consequently no *Tchin* or decoration. Without being altogether a disciple of Count Tolstoi, he believes that the future of Russia lies with the peasants ; but, unlike the Count, he recognises the necessity for national development and progress. That progress, however, he would seek only in directions that accord with the peculiar character and past history of the Slavonic race. A warm supporter of the peasant co-operative manufacturing communities, he has travelled all over Europe in search of new industries that could be introduced among them, and has spared no labour to press upon the *Zemstva* and the Government the necessity of aiding in every way this pre-eminently Russian movement. He calls himself a "social missionary," and from the views now held in certain high quarters, he is by no means a voice crying in the wilderness.)

One more guest I must introduce. He was until recently an official in one of the Government departments, but, greatly to his disgust, was placed upon the retired list. He admits, however, that he has not really much to complain of, since, his post being required for someone else, he was rapidly promoted over the heads of a number of others till he reached a rank at which he could be pensioned off. The pension, for Russia, is a rather liberal one, but he

is not the less aggrieved, as that is all the fortune he possesses. He has no children of his own, but his wife's sister, who had married an officer, was left a widow with five young children in a remote part of Russia, where their education was impossible. As a matter of course, he and his wife invited his sister-in-law and her children to live with them in St. Petersburg, and as she was absolutely without means of her own, entirely at their expense. Soon after, his own sister was left a widow in equally straitened circumstances and with a large family to maintain. Having thus nearly a dozen children on his hands, his only thought then was that a larger house was necessary. This he had taken, and no sooner were the three families installed than his retirement with a reduced income was forced upon him. If I mention this little episode in real life, it is only because it is typical of the Russian character, and not because it is in any way exceptional. The universal kind-heartedness of the Russians of all classes and the promptitude with which all, down to the poorest *moujick*, will give help at once when help is needed, represent a phase in the national character which speedily impresses itself upon every foreign resident. There is nothing patronising in this. The help is freely, ungrudgingly given, and as frankly accepted, for each knows that the other would have done identically the same thing had

the case been reversed. The Russians, like all the world, have many shortcomings, but their mutual helpfulness is a quality that covers a multitude of sins.

As might be expected from the late hours habitual in St. Petersburg society, it is not generally until the afternoon that the round of visits and festivities of every kind recommences. On the whole, theatregoing plays a smaller part in society than it does in many other pleasure-loving capitals. There are, besides, the galleries of paintings of more or less importance that are exhibited during the season. Concerts are generally very well attended, for the Russians unquestionably possess an exceptional capacity for music ; but, hitherto, Russian composers have rather contented themselves with drawing their inspiration from abroad, and giving it a Russian "tone," instead of boldly attempting to evolve a truly national school of their own, the elements for which are by no means wanting in several parts of the Empire. The greatest attractions of all are, of course, presented by the grand functions of the Court, the State balls and receptions, to which the cream of the official world is invited by the Emperor and Empress, and the hardly less splendid *fêtes* given from time to time at the palaces of the Imperial Grand Dukes, by the Ministers, or at the various Embassies. So far

as actual pleasure is concerned, however, I think that most Russians who have the *entrée* to the splendid but most wearisome official ceremonials would agree that it is rather in their own private and less formal festivities than in those of the Court that they find their chief enjoyment.

One word here as to a curious phase of character very generally to be met with among the higher classes in the capital. If the expression of a somewhat cynical indifference to religion is the "correct" attitude of society, this by no means extends to superstitions. For years St. Petersburg has been the happy hunting-ground for adventurers of every nationality professing some new craze in "occult" science. Almost every form of palmistry and cartomancy, spiritualism, and hypnotic or "faith" cures, find easy and credulous victims in Russian society. Most of the "professors" who have exhausted the credulity of Western Europe and America drift eventually to St. Petersburg, and form a by no means desirable addition to the foreign element there. Recently, however, the Government adopted very drastic measures for the suppression of this wide-spread species of fraud; but though Russia is no longer a safe place of residence for "professors of occult sciences," the evil is so deeply rooted that it will take years to eradicate it.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE URBAN WORKING CLASSES

MOSCOW is so essentially Russian, that I have selected the old capital of the Empire for a brief sketch of the urban life of the manufacturing, commercial, and working classes. In describing the burgher residents of the smaller towns, I have already mentioned the serious disadvantages under which they laboured until quite recent times, and some of the conditions of municipal government which hamper them even now. At the present day, it is true, the younger members of the wealthier commercial classes in the larger towns often lead a life that differs but little from that of the officials. Indeed, so far as display is concerned, their mode of living sometimes entails an expenditure that none but officials of the highest rank can attempt to rival. This, however, is quite a modern innovation, and even yet is by no means universal. In the youth of men still but little beyond middle-age, the conditions of life in the commercial

and manufacturing world were widely different and left traces that are to be found everywhere. Every townsman above the rank of a labourer was obliged to become a member of one or other of the Town Guilds. If wealthy enough to be a member of the First Guild, and to hold that position uninterruptedly for twenty-five years, his children became eligible for service under the Crown as officers in the army, or as civil officials; if in the Second Guild, though his sons could never hold any official appointment, they were relieved from service as private soldiers in the army. In certain cases, members of the First Guild were able to obtain a charter raising them to the rank of "hereditary respectable citizens," the highest position they could obtain. Only the members of this grade were exempt from corporal punishment, and also from having their heads shaved, if arrested for any offence, until after the trial and sentence had been pronounced. There were also, until comparatively recent times, a number of severe sumptuary laws, such, for instance, as the prohibition of any burgher, even the wealthiest banker, from driving in a carriage with more than one horse.

Far more serious, however, were the restrictions upon education; none but the sons of members of the highest Guilds being permitted to enter a university, or acquire what was called

“superior instruction.” Even in their case the privilege could only be obtained with the utmost difficulty. Russian girls belonging to the burgher class were placed under still greater disadvantages, for they were not allowed to attend any but the elementary schools, in which reading, writing, and arithmetic alone were taught. It is necessary to bear these facts in mind, as these were among the conditions of life to which the members of all burgher families now over fifty years of age were subjected in their youth, however wealthy their parents might have been. Until after 1860, there were not a score of boarding-schools for girls of any class of society in the whole Empire. Most of these were under the special patronage of the Empress, and none but the daughters of high Court officials were accepted. The daughters of nobles were generally educated by foreign governesses at home, but this privilege was rarely granted even to the wealthiest of the burgher class. Most of these disabilities have now been abolished, at least in strict law, but it is easy to realise that for many years to come their traces must remain.

The home life of the burgher class is still very primitive as a rule. For generations the sumptuary laws, and fear of offending the higher officials by any avoidable display necessarily curtailed the family expenditure in many directions, and this, to a certain extent, aided the

accumulation of the vast fortunes which not a few of the great Moscow merchants now enjoy. Until comparatively recent years, almost the only extravagance in which they could safely indulge without danger of exciting the ill-feeling of officials was the purchase of vast quantities of silver-plate, pearls, and other jewelry and richly embroidered brocade, which their wives would wear upon rare festive occasions among themselves. But while the Government was thus hampering the social and intellectual development of the burgher class, whose sons could rarely obtain permission even to acquire abroad the technical and scientific education that was practically denied them at home, the greatest efforts were made to induce foreigners to settle in Russia, and establish new industries of every kind. As a natural result, most "Russian" industries carried on in factories under modern conditions were long mainly in the hands of foreigners, chiefly at first of German race. There were, of course, some exceptions, but as a rule until late years few industries conducted upon scientific principles have been established by Russians alone. A new era, however, is now opening, and the rapid progress which Russia has recently made in the industrial world shows clearly what she is capable of accomplishing when she has found full employment in those industries for all her now unemployed millions of capable workers.



The emancipation of the serfs had one altogether unlooked-for result in giving a great impetus to industrial and mining enterprise. The idea of the Government was that while the maintenance of the peasantry was to be assured by handing over to them the three hundred and fifty million acres of land that they received as their endowment, the nobles, from whom the land was chiefly taken, would employ the immense sums they received as compensation in developing the agricultural land that remained to them upon scientific principles. In reality they did nothing of the kind. A large proportion, as we have seen, squandered the capital that had come to them, as an unexpected windfall, in St. Petersburg and abroad. The remainder invested it in banking and other financial operations ; and these were devoted mainly to the extension of manufactures, as offering the best and safest return. In combination with German, Belgian, French, and other manufacturers, who opened branches in Russia, industrial factories of all kinds were established, and the mining interests more fully developed. Meanwhile the peasants, the great majority of the Russian nation, instead of obtaining full employment upon the improved estates of their late masters, as the Government had expected, soon found themselves, as we have seen, worse off than before, and a growing proportion is compelled to seek in manufactures

and industries the only possible means of subsistence. In spite of the rapid development of industries, however, the demand for employment is far greater, and wages are still at what would be regarded in other lands as the "starving point." [Happily, most of the working classes, being peasants as well, are to a certain extent provided for by their land, so that whatever they earn beyond, however little, is so much gained. The land endowment of the peasantry has therefore had the unexpected result of acting as a subsidy to manufacturers, by rendering it possible for labour to be obtained for wages upon which the workers could not even exist if wholly dependent upon them.]

All these social and economic changes have been going on so quietly, that few who have not lived in Russia can realise that their results are fully as great as might, in other lands, have been obtained by nothing short of a revolution. Some idea of the enormous growth of Russian industries can be formed from the fact that during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century the annual production of coal in Russia rose from one and three-quarter millions of tons to over twelve millions; pig-iron from three hundred and seventy thousand tons to two and a quarter millions, and steel from forty-eight thousand to over a million and a half tons. The total value of Russia's manufactures in 1899 was

nearly four times as great as those of 1879. [This increase in industrial production is, of course, leading to a change in the relative proportions of urban and rural population ; but this is less rapid than might be expected, as so many of these new industries are carried on in what are densely populated rural districts rather than in towns.]

For many years to come the population of the towns will continue to fluctuate with the immigration of workmen in winter and their emigration in the spring. But now, in the first days of winter, we should find them pouring into the manufacturing centres in tens of thousands. In some respects the appearance of these peasant invaders would remind one of the bands of pilgrims I have described elsewhere ; but here they are not worn-out patriarchs, painfully toiling on to their death in the Holy Land or at some distant shrine, but active workers, often with their wives and families, who look forward to this six months' stay in town with as much satisfaction as the noble landowners to their season in St. Petersburg. Each party is, of course, organised as an *artel*. One of their number is elected as their *Starosta* ; and as heavy responsibility rests upon him, each member of the *artel* agrees to pay him a few *kopecks* weekly for his supervision. Once the *Starosta* is chosen, the *moujick* troubles himself no further. The little

group waits near the station, or proceeds, each member with his bundle on his shoulder, to the nearest *traktir*. Some hours later the *Starosta* turns up again. He has found a manufacturer who has engaged his *artel* for the season ; the agreement has been drawn up ; he has affixed his mark in place of a signature, and he has handed over his passport and those of his comrades to their new master. These documents the employer will keep in his possession until the period for which the men were engaged has expired, as he is responsible to the Government for their conduct, and they cannot quit the town till their passports are returned. A copy of the contract which the *Starosta* has signed is gummed into a book that is given to him, this book containing the rules to be observed in the factory, which have previously been approved by the Industrial Inspection Department. This matter being now arranged, the *artel* of workmen have nothing further to do than to shoulder their bundles and march off to their new abode.]

Near all large Russian factories, houses are erected by the employers, in which the work-people are lodged at an exceedingly low rental. These lodging-houses are frequently of enormous size and accommodate several hundred people. The most primitive are arranged like barracks. On the ground floor there is an immense kitchen and dining-room, and the successive floors above

are divided into three classes of vast dormitories: one for married couples, the second for unmarried men, and the third for unmarried women and children. In houses of this class, the rental, which includes heating, light, and the use of the stove in the kitchen for cooking, rarely exceeds from a shilling to one and sixpence a month. For families that can afford to pay from three to five shillings a month a superior lodging-house is provided. Here a long corridor runs through the centre of each floor, with windows at the ends, and opens on both sides into large separate rooms which accommodate families of from three to six members. The rooms are well ventilated and warm, as the whole house is heated by immense stoves of the type described in the landowner's *château*. Russian families are frequently very numerous, and the difficulty that would be entailed by too rigid rules against overcrowding is met by counting two children under fourteen, or four under ten, as "one person" in each apartment that is registered to contain three or more adult lodgers. The furniture is, of course, exceedingly simple,—a large solid table, wooden benches and bedsteads, and a few cupboards,—but quite equal to that with which they are satisfied in their village *izbas*. The straw beds and bedding they provide for themselves.

Besides the general government of his *artel*,

the *Starosta* has also to act as caterer, and sometimes as cook, for the whole company. Very frequently all the *Starostas* in a large factory unite and contract for the purchase of the provisions they require at wholesale prices. In this case, the men pay the *Starosta* for their board at the same rate as they would in an ordinary eating-house. There is consequently a considerable profit made, as the expense of fuel for cooking is covered by the rent they pay. This profit is returned by the *Starosta* to the men when their contract with the firm terminates, and is divided equally among them, less a bonus of about five per cent. to their chief as an inducement to be as economical as he can. In the case of families, the food is often obtained uncooked, and prepared by themselves on the immense stove in the kitchen, which is kept hot night and day for the purpose of warming the house. Even for families, however, the system of a common commissariat for all is found cheapest, the rations for children being counted as three-quarters, one-half, or a quarter, according to their age. As the food hardly ever varies, this system works more easily than it otherwise would do. For dinner and supper it is always rye-bread and *Stchie*, and for breakfast rye-bread and *Kvas*. Many Russian firms, however, especially where a number of women and children are engaged, give them a certain quantity of tea

and sugar as a gratuity. Disputes between the *Starosta* and the *artel* are extremely rare, notwithstanding the complicated accounts he has to keep, though more often than not all are absolutely unable to read or write. The systems they adopt are often exceedingly ingenious. In one that I found very generally adopted, each workman is represented by a short stick, which the *Starosta* cuts and notches in various ways, to represent the amount of work that he has done, and, consequently, the share of the total pay that is due to him. As a rule, in Russia factory hands are not paid by time but, as far as possible, by *Sdelnaia plata*, as it is called, *i. e.*, at a fixed rate for the work actually done. < The employer pays the *Starosta* the total earnings of the whole *artel*, and this he afterwards divides among the members. >

The Russian factory laws were completely revised in 1886, and they now protect the interests of the working classes quite as fully as those of any other country in Europe. The hours of labour for women and children are strictly limited, and all Sunday labour is prohibited except in cases of absolute necessity. Wages must be paid in cash, and to supply workmen with goods in lieu of a part of their earnings is a criminal offence, severely punished. No workman can be dismissed until the period of his contract has expired, except in certain

specified cases of misconduct ; and as his passport is in his employer's possession, he is, of course, equally compelled to fulfil his part of the bargain. The master can inflict fines for any breach of the rules printed in the book given to each workman and accepted by the Labour Inspection Department ; but these fines must be paid into a fund devoted to the workmen's benefit, and from which assistance can be given to them in case of accident or sickness. Finally, all large factory owners whose works are situated out of town, and who employ more than a certain number of operatives, are bound by law to provide a hospital, a bath-room, a school, and a library, for the use of all which the work-people make no payment of any kind. In case of dispute with their employer, the workmen may at any time appeal to the nearest magistrate. As it is the object of the Government to avoid all excuse for strikes, the men are bound to take this course, and would be punished if they attempted to put pressure upon the employer in any other way. On the other hand, when the master is in the wrong, he is liable to certain specified fines ; and should his action have led to any disorder or disturbance among his men, he may be sentenced to three months' imprisonment, and even have his factory closed and his licence withdrawn.

The wages of the workmen, as a rule, are






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exceedingly low. From the investigations I have made in the chief manufacturing districts, I have found that in the spinning and weaving factories the total earnings of the men for the six months of winter rarely amount to more than from £9 to £12, and even in the iron and steel foundries, and other trades where greater technical skill is needed, only a small proportion of the Russian workmen employed earn more than from £12 to £15 for the half-year. M. Mikhailovski, Chief Inspector of Factories, estimates the average earnings of industrial workmen at £9 15s. the half-year for the whole of Russia, £8 15s. in the Central Provinces and Moscow, and £12 in St. Petersburg, where wages are highest. Women's earnings are, as a rule, two-thirds those of men engaged in the same trade. It would seem to be no easy matter for even a Russian workman to save much out of such meagre pay as this ; but, nevertheless, he generally contrives to do so, especially if he be a *Raskolnik*, who refrains from touching alcohol or tobacco. His daily fare of rye-bread and cabbage soup is at least equal to what he would have to live upon at home, and rarely costs him more than nine shillings a month, or £2 14s. the half-year. As a rule, his total expenses for rent, firing, and food are less than £3 12s. for the six months. Should his total earnings, therefore, be only £9 or £10, in that period a steady man will often

take back with him £5 or £6, a sum that represents fully as much for a Russian peasant in a remote village as four or five times that amount would do for a British or American workman living in a large city. Clothes cost him almost nothing, as they are mainly produced from the wool of his own sheep and the flax and hemp grown upon his own land, and woven by his family. 

A large proportion of the more modern manufacturing have been established wholly or in part with foreign capital, Belgian, French, or German, and nearly all of these are under foreign managers. They have also a large staff of foreign workmen, many of whom act as foremen and instructors to the Russian employés. These men are, of course, paid upon a very different scale, and as a rule receive about double what their wages would be in their own country, as they are only engaged for a few years, until they can be replaced by Russians. There is rarely any intimacy between these foreign and native workmen, however, as the former generally treat the *moujicks* with a contemptuous disdain that, among any other European race than the Russians, would be much more frequently resented with serious results. So far as foreign employers are concerned, the Russian work-people in factories are fairly protected by the law ; but it is less easy to procure redress

for ill-treatment from their foreign fellow-workmen, especially where women and girls are victims, as the peasants, accustomed in their village government to have all their disputes among themselves settled by their own elected judges, are in such cases reluctant to appeal to a town magistrate for protection. The Belgians appear to be the greatest offenders in this respect, and in a recent Government report the writer declares that "Too often their conduct bears an unpleasant resemblance to that adopted by their officials in the administration of the Congo." They do not, in fact, realise that the peasant, who would uncomplainingly submit to corporal punishment, more or less legally inflicted upon himself by other Russians in his far-away village, strongly objects when his wife or daughters are kicked and cuffed by workmen imported from abroad, merely because they have failed to comprehend the instructions given to them. Patient as the Russian peasant generally is, he does sometimes retaliate, and disturbances between Russian and foreign workmen have certainly become much more frequent of late. The *Novoe Vremya* of August 10, 1900, describes an attack made by Russian workmen upon Belgians engaged in several factories near Constantinovsk, in which over eighty houses occupied by the latter were wrecked and burned. The object was to drive them from the district, but the

foreigners sustained no personal injuries in the riot. ¶ In all large factories there is, of course, a permanent staff of work-people employed the whole year through, but their earnings per month are but little more than those of the agricultural peasant who becomes an artisan only in the winter months.





## CHAPTER XX

### INDUSTRIAL CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATIONS

IN the course of our survey of the life of various classes of society in Russia, we have seen the remarkable capacity evinced by the peasantry for co-operation. Whatever kind of work has to be done, from reaping the crops to the entire cultivation of a farm, a group of peasants, or several different groups united in *artels*, find no difficulty in forming an association by which the undertaking can be carried out. But this capacity is by no means confined to agriculture alone. I have shown how, in the days of serfdom, new industries were introduced by the nobles into many remote districts as a means of providing profitable employment for their serfs during the long winter months, when agricultural labour was out of the question. The seed thus planted in many cases took root at once, and such districts became the centres of active industrial enterprise. Much more frequently, however, it lay dormant, just retaining its vitality, but

waiting for more favourable circumstances for its further development. These circumstances have now arisen from the very misfortunes which, as we have seen, have fallen upon so large a proportion of the peasantry since the Emancipation.

Tens of thousands of peasants, whose holdings are now subdivided into minute portions, are unable to live upon the produce of their land, and yet cannot obtain permission from their commune and the authorities to withdraw permanently from their villages, as the burden of taxation would weigh yet more heavily upon those who remain. In some form of industrial labour alone can a large proportion hope to find the means of living at all.

Falling back upon their favourite resource of co-operation, the more enterprising peasantry in thousands of villages, all over Russia, first unite in an *artel*, elect their *Starosta*, and then set to work. Even the smallest venture requires some capital, however, though often for a beginning £4 or £5 suffice. Sometimes this small sum they can themselves save up; sometimes it is borrowed; and sometimes it is obtained by sending part of their number to work in the nearest town during the winter months. The capital secured, the next step is the construction of the *Svietelka*, or co-operative workshop,—only a roughly built wooden *izba* at the end of their village,—and here the trade



learned long ago in the days of serfdom, and carried on fitfully ever since as a cottage industry, makes a new start. These trades are very numerous, and embrace almost every description of spinning and weaving in wool, flax, hemp, cotton, and silk ; metal work, from the manufacture of arms to locks and fish-hooks ; and the production of almost every article that can be made in wood, bone, leather, *papier-maché* and a vast number of other materials.

[Spinning and weaving, of course, hold an important place among these trades, for both have been household industries for ages, and the rude, home-made looms set up in the *Svietelkas* are at first only a slight improvement upon those used at home. A sale for the fabric is obtained in the market of the nearest town, or through middle-men, who speedily appear in any district when a new rural trade springs into existence.]

[During the last twenty years, large manufacturing firms have discovered that these co-operative associations can easily be developed into the nuclei of important manufacturing centres, as they are free from some of the disadvantages that large firms have to contend with. They are taxed at a much lower rate in proportion to their output, and, indeed, often escape taxation altogether. They are not obliged to sink a large amount of capital for the purchase of an expensive site in a manufacturing town,

or of high-priced modern machinery. Whenever any motive power is needed, they can use their own oxen and ponies to provide it, and this costs them nothing, as in any case the animals have to be kept through the winter, and anything they can help to earn is so much gained. Besides this, the whole family, working in their own village, can give their labour at the lowest possible rate. Unemployed, their six months' winter would be time wholly lost. They are more or less completely provided for, and all they can earn in their village in winter is so much saved from time that would otherwise have been completely wasted. In this case they also save the expense of a long journey and of living away from home in a manufacturing town. Here are all the elements needed for an industrial co-operative partnership, upon lines closely resembling those which work quite successfully in the cultivation of the landowners' estates in summer. It often happens, indeed, that the factory owner is himself the proprietor of landed property in the country, and employs these same peasants in an agricultural partnership in summer in the cultivation of his land. To develop the peasant association for their mutual advantage into an industrial partnership in winter, the factory owner frequently advances a small sum for the building of a larger *Svietelka* and the construction of



A CO-OPERATIVE "SVIETELKA"  
*From a photograph by the author*



better machinery. The peasants are also supplied by him with raw material, and the work when done is bought back, at a fixed price. In the textile trades the peasants are now generally supplied with warp and weft, as weaving is more advantageously carried on in these village factories than spinning, except in the case of some of the finer kinds of linen and cloth. A similar system is adopted in many other trades, the peasants receiving the raw material in a form that has passed through the initial stages of manufacture by machinery, so that their work consists in its completion more or less by hand.

In an immense number of cases, however, these peasant industrial associations are started and carried on by themselves, without any assistance from regular manufacturers. Very often, indeed, they are serious commercial rivals, and in several branches have decidedly got the better of their competitors. Some idea may be formed of the important part played in Russian life by these village industries from the immense number of peasants engaged in the different trades. In the provinces of Vladimir and Moscow alone, more than ten thousand peasants devote their time in winter to various kinds of silk-weaving, and a far larger number to the weaving of cotton, linen, and woollen fabrics. More than two hundred thousand peasants belong to co-operative associations for the

building of carts, carriages, and sledges.} Many of the latter are extremely artistic in their form and ornamentation, and are sold for high prices in St. Petersburg and Moscow, being used by the wealthiest classes of society, including the Imperial family. Over a hundred and forty thousand are now engaged in different branches of cooperage, and about the same number in furniture and cabinet-making. In the preparation and manufacture of sheepskin and fur coats—largely for export to Asia—more than three hundred and fifty thousand peasants find winter employment in their own *Svietelkas*, often in remote districts, fifty miles and more from the nearest railway station. These figures, imposing as they are, really fall far below the actual number, as they only relate to the members of peasant associations sufficiently important to be registered officially. It is estimated that nearly equal numbers work in smaller, unregistered associations, as, in order to encourage the development of these village industries, registration (and consequently taxation) is not insisted upon until they have reached a certain degree of importance.

Reference has already been made to the intense personal interest felt by the Russian people as a whole—nobles, traders, and peasantry alike—in the development of their Empire in Asia. We can easily understand the cause

of this feeling among the peasantry, and discover how tens of thousands among those whom the casual visitor in the summer months would suppose to be merely agricultural labourers are to a great extent dependent for their daily bread upon the Oriental markets in which their products are sold. The coopering industry is now almost exclusively in the hands of peasant associations, and presents us with a very curious example of this Oriental trade. All goods sent by land to the Asiatic markets must, of course, be securely packed; but many Russian merchants have adopted a system for avoiding the loss sustained by transporting packing cases that are of no value on reaching their destination.

【Whenever possible, goods intended for Persia, Bokhara, Turkestan, or China are packed in casks, tubs, or buckets which on their arrival are often sold for as high a price as an equal weight of the goods they contain.】 The tubs are generally made with the staves of different coloured woods and ornamented in various ways, with sometimes very artistic designs burnt in. Allied to the cooper's trade is the manufacture of packing cases, which likewise are often so constructed as to be salable objects for other purposes. Cases for some kinds of goods are painted in peculiar and very artistic designs, and are now in great demand in Persia as receptacles for holding household linen or

other articles. Not long ago, a lady in Paris showed me a curious cabinet which she had bought at a sale, and which occupied a place of honour in her drawing-room. She was not a little surprised when I told her that it had been originally a Russian soap-box, one of a kind made in thousands in far-away villages for export to Asia.

In the ornamentation adopted, a curious difficulty has to be met. All over the East, certain colours and designs are considered "unlucky" and these, of course, must be avoided. The Russian Government now gratuitously supplies these peasant associations with coloured plates of designs that will not offend the prejudices of Persian or Chinese purchasers. In the province of Nijnii-Novgorod and the neighbouring governments, many thousands of peasants are engaged in the manufacture of enamelled wooden spoons, specimens of which are sometimes found in cheap bazaars in England. The number they produce now exceeds a hundred and twenty millions per annum, and more than half are exported to Persia, Bokhara, and China. Many of the more expensive of these spoons are carved and painted in very artistic designs, but the work is so complicated that each spoon passes through the hands of fifteen different *artels*, associated together, but often in different villages, each of which



has made a specialty of some particular process. The manner in which the varnish is hardened, so as not to melt in boiling water, is a trade secret which the peasants jealously keep. In other districts, especially in the province of Vladimir, a large number of village communities are wholly occupied in the manufacture of toys for the Persian, Bokharan, and Chinese children ; and very curious many of them are, as they are all made to suit the respective national peculiarities of their little Asiatic customers. More than five thousand peasants are engaged in this trade alone. Many important metal trades are also carried on by these peasant associations. [In lock and cutlery making, among other branches, Russian manufacturers now find it to their advantage to confine their operations to cutting or stamping parts of each article by machinery, then leaving the whole work to be finished by their peasant partners in their own villages by hand.] There are even some branches of trade in which not only the Russian, but the German and Belgian firms established in Russia have been completely beaten out of the field by the peasant associations. One of these is the extremely important manufacture of the national *samovar*, or tea-urn, to be found in every house and cottage in Russia. This has been rendered possible by the use of an exceedingly clever but simple machine

invented by a Russian peasant a few years ago.

The productions of the peasant associations are, however, by no means confined to objects of a purely utilitarian character. One of the most important of their industries is the painting of *icons*, or sacred pictures, one at least of which will be found in the *izba* of even the poorest peasant. These *icons* are not only sold in Russia, but are largely exported to all the neighbouring countries whose inhabitants belong to the Orthodox Church. Some idea of the immense importance of the industry can be formed from the fact that in two provinces alone, Vladimir and Kursk, no fewer than two millions of *icons* are made annually by these associations. Each is drawn and painted entirely by hand, and the peasant artists are unaided by mechanical contrivances of any description. It is characteristic of the Russian peasants that though their labour might be enormously reduced, and their profits increased, by adopting some process in which machinery has played a part, they have hitherto indignantly refused to avail themselves of any of the means—such as printed transfers, which they could finish painting by hand—offered them by French and German firms. They regard their occupation not only as a trade, but as a religious work as well, and in their belief the *icon* would lose its sacred

character if produced by other means than hand work alone. It is also a matter of conscience with them that the *icons* should not pass into the hands of anyone who is not a member of the Orthodox Church, and I never met with a peasant who would consent to sell me one even for many times its real value. Formerly the painting of *icons* was carried on exclusively by monks in the monasteries, but it is now almost entirely in the hands of the peasantry. The cheaper kinds are generally painted on small panels of lime or alder, and the pigments they use are all prepared by themselves. Many are of extreme brilliancy, but the process they employ in their preparation is a jealously guarded secret. Some of these *icons* are the work of single peasant artists, but for the cheapest kinds which can be bought in the shops of the large towns for a few pence, there is considerable division of labour. One peasant association makes a specialty of drawing and painting the figures of the saints, and then passes the unfinished work on to another, sometimes in a different village, where the background only is put in. A third group completes the painting and varnishing, and, finally, a fourth adds the tinfoil ornamentation which replaces the silver used in *icons* of a more sumptuous kind. All four of these groups of peasants work together in a single co-operative partnership. Many of these *icons* are executed

with no little artistic skill, though there is no room for the exercise of any imaginative faculty, as the slightest deviation from the old models copied would be regarded as a deadly sin.

Art in Russia, so far as it is purely national, would seem to have derived its inspiration either from the Church, when it is easy to recognise its Byzantine origin, or from the yet older pagan beliefs, of which so many traces remain in the every-day life of the people. In the designs engraved by these peasant manufacturers upon the *samovars*, metal trays, *bubentchiks*, or bells worn on the horses' harness, and numberless other objects, the patriarch or saint represented on the *icons* reappears as a bearded Boyard in his rich embroidered robes. Perhaps his lady is standing near him in her not less picturesque costume, a mass of pearls and other precious stones. In another favourite design a group of sheepskin-clad peasants are represented kneeling at the feet of their lord, just as they would before their patron saint, offering him bread and salt. In other cases the idea of the decoration is drawn from the old mythology, in which forest demons and water-sprites play the chief part.

The artistic faculty of the Russian peasant has a wider range in the cheap jewelry and trinkets of all kinds which are manufactured in immense quantities by these co-operative associations. In the government of Kostroma, for example, there

are more than fifty villages along the banks of the Volga in which almost the whole of the inhabitants are engaged in this trade during the winter months, and here more than fifteen millions of earrings, bracelets, brooches, locketts, rings, etc., are made every year. Most are in copper, brass, or other cheap metal, but notwithstanding this they are carefully made, and are often gilded with gold-leaf by a process that is said to have been imported by the Tartars. The gold- and silver-leaf employed is also the product of a peasant industry carried on in many villages, especially in the provinces of Moscow and Kalouga. Not only in Kostroma, but in many other governments, this manufacture of jewelry, trinkets, and *articles de Paris* is very largely carried on, and in passing from one lonely village to another, the traveller might make a collection of many hundreds of these hand-made knick-knacks, from grotesquely carved pipes and cigarette holders to purses, paper-weights, and inkstands. Fully one-half of these village products are exported to Asiatic Russia and Persia.

The foregoing are but a small proportion of the trades in which the peasants are engaged during the winter months. The subject is well worthy of investigation by those who are interested in developing village industries in Ireland and among the Scottish crofters. The latter especially might with advantage learn much from these

co-operative associations. The rural industries have been greatly aided during the last ten or twelve years by the action of the Government, the *Zemstva*, and associations under the patronage of the late and present Emperors, both of whom regarded the development of peasant industries as a matter of the highest national importance. To help them in their more important trades, trained technical teachers are sent during the winter from village to village at the State's expense, and their services are eagerly sought by the peasant industrial *artels*. Exhibitions of peasant products are frequently held at Moscow and other leading centres, and the Government advances to the peasant communities loans at a low rate of interest for the purchase of raw material. Unfortunately, the Russian peasants have far greater industrial than commercial capacity, and they are consequently sadly exploited by the middle-men, Germans, Jews, Belgians, Armenians, and Greeks, who purchase their products for less than half the price eventually obtained for them. The subject is one of such vast importance for the future of Russia, that I will add in conclusion a very striking remark of Professor D. I. Mendeléef, published a few years ago, as it exactly describes the policy which the Russian Government is steadily pursuing in the industrial development of the country. After describing how the principle of co-operation in

the *artel* has permitted the industries of the Russian peasants to survive the competition of capital, by which hand labour and small factories have been largely crushed out of existence in other countries, he observes : " All this clearly shows that for Russia the last word has not been pronounced in the struggle between large and small enterprises, and there is every reason to hope that it will soon appear again most profitable and expedient to carry on a large part of the industries on a small scale, leaving only a portion of them to be handled by large enterprises, which will eventually probably pass into the hands of the Government, as in the case of the railways."





## CHAPTER XXI

### EDUCATION AND THE ARMY

IT is a curious feature of the Russian educational system that many of the different departments of State have whole groups of schools of various kinds under their own separate control. The Holy Synod and the *Zemstva*, for example, both support a large number of schools all over the Empire, and a by no means friendly rivalry exists between them, as the latter are as progressive as the present policy of the Government permits. Other groups are maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Marine, and the War Office, and others again by the directors of the Associated Charities known as the "Institutions of the Empress Marie." The general control of all these groups is placed in the hands of the Department of Public Instruction. For this purpose the whole Russian Empire is divided into fourteen arrondissements, each of which is placed under a "curator" appointed by the Minister. These arrondissements,



necessarily of enormous size, are divided into districts; and each district into smaller subdivisions controlled by inspectors and other functionaries appointed by the curator. The Department of Public Instruction is assisted by a "Scientific Council," as an advising body, in all matters connected with education, from the universities to the village schools, and each year a list of books approved by this Council is published. For some time past, however, the whole system of education in Russia has been in a transition state, and even in the official reports published there is a good deal of confusion, as data relating to non-Russian portions of the Empire, such as Poland, Finland, and the Baltic provinces, are sometimes included.

From these reports it would appear that the total number of children and young persons receiving instruction in Russia now amounts to nearly three millions. This would imply that only about a quarter of the population "of school age" receive instruction of any kind, but it must be borne in mind that, as we have seen, the children of a very large section of the inhabitants of Russia, most of the *Raskolniki* and the Jews for example, though not attending any school, receive quite as good an elementary education in their own homes as the village schoolmaster could provide. In most of the village schools controlled by the Synod, the

instruction is confined to learning the Russian and old Slavonic alphabets, the Church catechism, and the rudiments of arithmetic. In the rival schools, maintained by the *Zemstva*, however, the instruction is of a far more practical character, in spite of the unceasing opposition they have to contend with. In all these elementary schools the classes are mixed for boys and girls, but the latter rarely number more than thirty per cent. of the pupils who attend. One of the greatest educational difficulties to be contended with in the rural districts is the distance that must often be traversed to reach the nearest village school. This is frequently so great as to render it impossible for the children to go and return in the same day. The difficulty is increased by most of the schools being open only in winter, the labour of all but the youngest children being far too valuable to be sacrificed in summer. To meet this difficulty, arrangements are now very generally made by which boys and girls under fourteen are received as weekly boarders, and this entails no extra expense to the parents, as each pupil brings from home a fixed contribution of rye-bread and *stchie* sufficient for a child's maintenance for a week.

The establishments for superior instruction comprise the universities, special high schools, theological academies, and military, naval, medical, agricultural, mining, and engineering schools.

These in Russia are attended by about twenty thousand pupils annually. Corresponding with these superior institutions are the "middle class" and "normal" schools, together with a number of others of a more or less charitable character, which provide education in the Russian provinces for about a hundred and twenty thousand boys and seventy thousand girls. Besides these there are also a large number of private schools for both male and female students, all of which, however, are under the strictest supervision of the educational authorities. The system of instruction is to a great extent copied from Germany, and in most cases the curriculum and Government examinations are exceedingly severe.

For some time past the disturbed condition of the student world, especially in the universities and theological seminaries, has caused the Government no little anxiety. This is not due to any apprehension of a revival of militant Nihilism, but rather to the fear of a development of Socialism in a form that would prove attractive to many of the working classes, who would never listen to the more violent principles of Nihilism. For several reasons the Russian students of both sexes are far more inclined to revolutionary ideas than those of almost any other European nation. Conscious of the backwardness of their own country, the susceptible

nature of the Slav leads the younger generation to seek a remedy for this reproach by adopting what they believe to be the very latest and most advanced theories of modern civilisation. Besides this, a large proportion of the students are in a state of poverty, almost of destitution, which renders them yet more disposed to give free play to their imaginations, and build up society anew upon a system in which hunger and cold and suffering shall be abolished for ever.

When the universities were thrown open to all classes of society, a vast number of *Bourses* were founded for the support of indigent students. The Emperor Alexander II. gave half a million roubles to the University of St. Petersburg for this purpose, and his example was at once followed by an immense number of private persons. As a result of this well-meant munificence nearly two-thirds of the students in the universities are now dependent upon Government or private subsidies, but these are generally so small in amount as hardly to suffice even for the barest necessities of life. Quite recently, in several of the universities, many of the students were unable to leave their lodgings to attend the classes for weeks at a time, as in their ill-clad and shoeless condition they dared not face the cold of a Russian winter. Male and female students crowd together in the

cheapest lodgings that they can find, while their families, generally living far away in some remote corner of rural Russia, are unable to exercise any wholesome influence to counteract that of the atmosphere of discontent and suffering and wild dreams of a "Social Reformation" that their condition almost necessarily creates around them. It is hardly surprising that in the days of Nihilism nearly all the revolutionists condemned for political offences had received "superior instruction" and only one per cent. was illiterate. Many among them, indeed, owed their education to the donations of members of the Imperial family.

In the present condition of Russia, men of this class, even after receiving a university training, can hardly hope for any remunerative employment other than a Government post, but the not unnatural suspicion with which the *Boursiers* are now viewed is tending more and more to withdraw from them this resource for their future maintenance. Regarding the universities as hot-beds of radicalism and revolutionary propaganda, the financial and landed classes are even less disposed to give employment to men who, even if they do not get them into trouble with the Government, are only too often discontented and unpractical visionaries. Under such circumstances, the Government and other subventions to poor students, notwithstanding the beneficent

intentions of those by whom these *Bourses* were founded, really do more harm than good. A large proportion are the sons of poor parish priests, who make every sacrifice for years to send them to the university in the vain hope that a superior education will secure for them a Government post, and wipe out the stigma that, in the public mind, is attached to a *Popovitch*, the son of a priest. The families of many ruined landowners, too, forced by poverty to lead a life of discontent, and repining at the rural existence that is for most of them almost as terrible a fate as exile to Siberia, will starve themselves for half a lifetime to send their boys and girls to a university, as the only means of retrieving the social position they have lost. In such cases as these, only too often a cruel disappointment awaits them. Those for whom they have sacrificed so much leave the university with a good education, it is true, but not the less with a cloud hanging over them. As *Boursiers* they are looked upon with suspicion, and a large proportion, unable to find any profitable opening in life, are almost forced into the ranks of the revolutionary and very often the criminal classes. Of late years, however, several societies have been formed under Government auspices to aid the poorer class of students by providing them with board and lodging, books and clothing at a reduced rate, or gratuitously, and under super-

vision that ensures for them a healthier moral atmosphere than they could find in the squalid surroundings among which the majority are forced to live.

The vast improvement in the education of girls during the last few years is a remarkable feature in the intellectual development of the Russian people. In most institutions for female education, in the higher as well as in the elementary schools, the course of instruction is now identically the same as for boys. The high position that they have won in the medical profession is well known, and the rapid increase in the number of women doctors can hardly fail to have very beneficial results, especially among the lower classes of society. In an earlier chapter I described the village *Feldscher* as one of the most valuable of the rural officials. There is now an increasing tendency in many parts of the country to give the post of *Feldscher* to women doctors who have obtained the corresponding medical certificate. Acting under the instructions of the *Vratch*, or physician, they are often able, both as nurses and doctors, to render a far greater degree of assistance in rural districts than is possible to their male *confrères*. The Russian Government, indeed, now recognises how vast are the services that women are often able to render in directions inaccessible to men. During the last few years classes have

been opened in which girls belonging to the higher ranks of society can receive thorough instruction in Oriental languages, especially Persian, Chinese, and all the more important of those spoken in British India. The students who have successfully passed their examinations are regarded as "attached" to the Foreign Office, for it is fully realised that women, having free access to Oriental families, whether as doctors, nurses, or governesses, are able to exercise an influence in many directions far greater than would be open to any of the sterner sex.

In Russia, as in all other Continental countries, the military and naval organisations play a highly important part in the life of the people, not only in providing an armed force, but also as an invaluable factor in the national education. According to the present military system, every Russian subject between twenty-one and forty-three years of age is liable to military service. From the enormous population upon which Russia has to draw, however, it would now be impossible for all, on reaching their twenty-first year, to pass into the active army, and consequently when the number of recruits in any district exceeds the Government requirements, the question of which are to serve is settled by drawing lots, and the remainder pass into the *Opoltchenie*, or militia. This is divided into two sections. The first undergoes regular military



instruction for six weeks in each year, and serves as a reserve that can be drawn upon for the active army. The second consists of men who for various reasons are relieved from active service, or who for the time being are physically unfit for military duties. The peace strength of the army now amounts to exactly one million, and on a war footing the active army would number about three millions.

Besides these there are the nominally "irregular" mounted troops known as Cossacks. The Cossacks, though of pure Russian race, were originally independent and owed allegiance to their elected *Ataman*, or chief, alone, and, even after their absorption by the Empire, they were permitted to retain certain special privileges. Of these little but the shadow survives at the present day, but, notwithstanding, the Cossacks still regard themselves as far superior to the ordinary peasant. The total Cossack contribution to the Russian army amounts to about a hundred and fifty thousand, each man providing his own horse.

The naval forces, formed by maritime conscripts and those who voluntarily enlist, now reach a total of nearly fifty thousand men. Their service is nominally for fifteen years, seven of which are spent with the fleet and eight in the reserve. Both in the army and navy, however, exemptions are extremely numerous, and the

actual number of men available would probably be considerably less than that indicated on paper.

Military training has naturally produced the most striking results among the lower classes, as it has served to develop the very faculties in which the peasantry are most deficient. The recruit, drawn from the easy-going life of the village, where he seems incapable of doing anything, except as a member of his *artel*, is suddenly transported into a new world, in which many moral qualities that have hitherto lain dormant are called into play. Strict obedience is already a part of his very nature, but the necessity for order, exactitude, punctuality, and alertness is impressed upon him at every moment. A Russian peasant or workman upon the completion of his military service can nearly always command from twenty-five to fifty per cent. higher wages than those who have not had this advantage. It is not in moral training alone, however, that the lower classes have benefited by military service. Only a very small part of the multifarious requirements of the Russian army and navy could hitherto be supplied by private industry, and the Government has been compelled to convert itself into a colossal manufacturer and universal provider. Private industry has been fostered, it is true, whenever possible, but nevertheless the Government has been compelled in almost every branch to take

the initiative, from the weaving of cloth for the soldiers' uniforms to the making of common or scientific instruments. In the army almost every trade is carried on ; and rarely does a recruit return home, when his military service is over, without having gained some technical knowledge that greatly increases the value of his labour.

For the education of officers there are five military academies, and schools for medicine, surgery, and military law. There are also special technical schools for the artillery and military engineering, both of higher and lower grades, a military gymnasium for the corps of cadets, to which only the sons of officers are admitted, and, finally, schools for the sons of non-commissioned officers and soldiers, while adult schools are provided in which elementary instruction is given to illiterate soldiers. The number of schools and evening classes for adults is now being greatly increased, for the benefit not only of soldiers but of the working classes generally. In these schools lectures are given on instructive subjects, illustrated by the magic lantern ; and so greatly has the system developed of late that a special department has recently been opened in St. Petersburg, where the slides are made in immense numbers and distributed all over the Empire. One highly important section of this department manufactures slides which illustrate

improvements in a great number of the co-operative trades carried on by the peasants themselves. Aided by these and the explanatory lectures, many a young soldier, instead of forgetting his village industry, returns home with his mind stored with new ideas for its development. These classes are held in nearly all the garrison towns in the Empire, informal examinations are made from time to time, and prizes of trifling value, but highly esteemed by the men, are given to those who have followed the lectures intelligently. Their success has led many of the *Zemstva* and municipal councils to establish similar classes in most of the larger towns for the benefit of the civilian peasantry who flock into the manufacturing districts during the winter months.

Notwithstanding all the restrictions imposed upon the Press, the newspaper plays a larger part in the intellectual development of the Russian people than is generally supposed. From the difficulty attending the free discussion of political questions, and the impossibility of openly criticising any act of the Government in print, a very large part of the newspaper is devoted to articles of a more or less instructive character, reviews of foreign works, and literature in the form of the *feuilleton*. Through articles of this kind, and by means of fiction, economic and political ideas by no means approved in bureau-

cratic circles are frequently expressed in a covert form which the censor finds it difficult to suppress, but which nevertheless the reader perfectly understands. The Press is unquestionably a growing power in Russia, and its influence, as a means of creating public opinion, is increased by the fact that it is now very largely supported by foreign capitalists, especially Belgian and French, whose financial aid in the material development of Russia cannot be dispensed with by the Government in the present condition of the country.

The newspaper Press and the reviews furnish the Russian public to a great extent with the reading that the relatively small number of books published could not supply. The *rôle* they play in this direction is the more important as the censorship—severe as it is—frequently allows many subjects to be treated with a degree of freedom in a short newspaper or review article that would never be permitted in book form. There is nothing equivalent to the halfpenny journals of England and America, and the newspaper in Russia has by no means the ephemeral character it possesses elsewhere. Carefully preserved, and passing from hand to hand, each copy has probably ten times as many readers of every word it contains as it would have in any other European country.

The question of charities in Russia leads us

to another phase in the moral character of the people, to which I must allude in conclusion. In Russia, where all is under bureaucratic direction, the public charities are entirely controlled by officials, and mainly supported by grants from the Government, though gifts and legacies from private persons are also made upon a liberal scale. A large proportion of these charities, existing in all parts of the Empire, are grouped together under the name of the "Institutions of the Empress Marie," and are governed by a board of directors, officials of ministerial rank, appointed by the Emperor personally. These "institutions" comprise asylums, schools, and hospitals of almost every kind, from boarding-schools in which the orphan daughters of officials of high rank, but in reduced fortunes, are educated, to asylums for the aged poor and foundlings. Official charities, the functionaries of which are responsible to their hierarchical superiors alone, are rarely satisfactory, and it must be admitted that this rule applies to most of the State-supported charities in Russia.

Fortunately, as I have already mentioned, the natural character of the Russian people themselves supplies many of the deficiencies in charities supported by the State. Among the very poorest peasants and working classes, nothing is more common than to find one or

more orphan children, perhaps left by complete strangers, adopted as a matter of course ; and only as a last resort would the foster-parents appeal for help in maintaining them, when in dire distress themselves. Nor is this neighbourly charity by any means confined to the lower orders. Perhaps the spirit in which help is rendered to members of the higher classes of society in reduced circumstances is even more typical of the Russian character. In these cases, every possible precaution is taken to avoid wounding the susceptibilities of the person or family aided, and, above all, to help them from sinking in the social scale.

I could give many instances of the delicacy and tact displayed in cases that have come to my own knowledge, but I will only allude to the working of one private association of influential Russians, that will explain the principle upon which such aid is rendered. An article in the *Spectator* in which I mentioned the organisation of this society, a few years ago, led to my receiving so large a number of inquiries for further details from English readers interested in charity organisation, that I am tempted to describe it once more.

The working of this association is exceedingly curious. About 1880, a small group of Russian gentlemen, whose personal honour and integrity were fully recognised in society, allowed it to

become known that they would consent to receive privately any persons in their own social position, and advise them, to the best of their ability, in any serious difficulty or embarrassment in which they might be placed. They pledged their honour that under no circumstances would they divulge any fact thus brought to their knowledge, or act in any way upon the information given, without the full consent of the applicant. Their aid and counsel were found to be of such invaluable assistance that a few years later the isolated group of founders developed into the "Association of Lay Confessors." Having no legal recognition by the State, it is, strictly speaking, a "Secret Society," but from the well-known position and aims of its supporters it is in no way interfered with. The members now comprise men representative of almost every class admitted to the social world,—officers and officials of high rank, bankers, physicians, etc., whose experience and practical advice in many moments of difficulty are of inestimable value. As it is a fundamental principle that the secret of these "Lay Confessions" respecting mundane troubles should be held as sacred as confession to a priest, the greatest care is exercised and every possible precaution taken in appointing new members. As a matter of fact, however, a breach of faith in this direction would be regarded as so dis-



graceful as to entail complete social ruin. The society is now possessed of considerable funds, derived from subscriptions from the members and donations from many who have been aided in the past.

Whenever the trouble is one that evidently calls for financial aid the money needed is always advanced as a loan, bearing interest from one to seven and a half per cent., and never as a gift, even when it is evident that it will be impossible for the borrower to repay. No security of any kind is accepted beyond the recipient's promise to devote the money exclusively to the purpose for which it is advanced, and to repay it when he is able ; and rarely indeed is this debt of honour left undischarged when a fortunate change of circumstances renders repayment possible. The financial assistance given, however, is by no means the most important. Introductions to influential persons, or into circles in which the special talents or acquirements of those who are aided would be appreciated, are often worth far more than mere temporary and incidental help, and many a Russian now in prosperous circumstances owes it to the "Lay Confessors" that he has not been forced by adverse fortune to take his place upon the downward grade.

The spirit that leads to this mutual helpfulness is, indeed, the key-note of the Russian character.

The Russian is not, and never can be, an individualist. In every phase of life and in every class of society, the same spirit evinces itself. It is this national tendency towards mutual help and support which alone renders the *artel* system universal among Russians of the lower classes, though every member of an *artel* knows that as the proceeds of their united labour are generally divided equally, the stronger or more skilful, who do more than their share of the work, are giving an advantage to their weaker or less competent partners. This is accepted as a matter of course, a feature inseparable from the system ; and hardly ever would a Russian complain or even admit that he was thus being unjustly treated for the benefit of his neighbour. It is solely this phase of the national character also that has rendered possible the great development of the co-operative system in the vast number of rural trades which, as we have seen, play so important a part in Russian life.

In the present transition state of the country, economically and socially, it would be no easy matter to specify the political ideals of the nation as a whole. Years must elapse before the various phases of public opinion will have crystallised into any definite form ; but, judging by the strongest and most striking features of the national character, there can, I think, be little doubt that Socialism, not necessarily in a revolu-

tionary form, will play the chief part in the domestic policy of the Empire. The colossal national endowment of the peasantry, which handed over to them three hundred and fifty million acres of land, is regarded by many Russian economists as only the first step in a collective policy that is essential for the national well-being. Besides the peasants for whom provision was thus made forty years ago, there is now a vast and rapidly increasing surplus population, which can be maintained only by industrial labour. These growing millions, it is pleaded, have an equal right to be provided for, and the principle, to a certain extent, is already recognised in the Government grants and loans that are now made to the industrial co-operative associations of peasants for the development of their manufactures.

Russia, as a whole, is but just emerging into the full blaze of modern light. Half dazzled by the unaccustomed brilliancy, we need not wonder if, in many directions, her progress seems slow and halting. To estimate correctly what that progress has been, it does not suffice merely to note the point that her people have already reached. We must, in every case, look back into the past along the road of shadow and storm that she has already traversed.





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